

4-1997

"Wen I wuz young" : the socialization and education of slave children on low country plantations, 1800-1860

Elizabeth Marshall Keys
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses>

Recommended Citation

Keys, Elizabeth Marshall, ""Wen I wuz young" : the socialization and education of slave children on low country plantations, 1800-1860" (1997). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 564.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/564>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.


**"Wen I wuz Young":
The Socialization and Education of Slave Children on Low Country Plantations, 1800-1860**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in
History from the College of William and Mary in Virginia,**

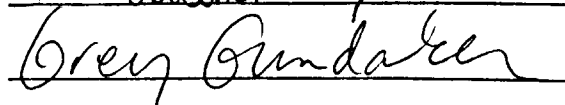
by

Elizabeth Marshall Keys

Accepted for High Honors
(Honors, High Honors, or Highest Honors)



Director

H.C. Walker


Grey Gundaker

**Williamsburg, Virginia
April, 1997**

Prefatory Note

I have chosen to use--in the title of this thesis and in the text--passages from interviews with former slaves taken by white interviewers as part of the Federal Writers Project division of the Works Progress Administration. Even during the 1930s when the interviews were conducted, some effort was made to encourage interviewers not to try to replicate all the dialect of those being interviewed. The words "wen" and "wuz" that appear in my title, for example, are pronounced identically by white and African-American speakers; the usage of the incorrectly spelled variations reflects the biases of the interviewer. I decided, however, that any attempt to correct any of these quotations could make them more inaccurate. The part of the quotation used for my title also appears as an epigram before Chapter Eight.

Table of Contents

1	The Development of Low Country Slavery, 1
2	Slaves' Homes and Gardens, 8
3	Slaves' Childhood Development, 15
4	Safeguarding Slave Children's Physical Well-Being, 25
5	The Slave Family, 32
6	Master-Slave Relationships, 39
7	Coastal Slave Children's Religion and Education, 48
8	The Socializing Tools of the Slave Community, 57
9	Conclusions, 69
10	Bibliographical Note, 72

Chapter One

The Development of Low Country Slavery

"More like a Negro country than like a country settled by white people."¹

--Swiss immigrant Samuel Dyssli's 1737 description of South Carolina

The first Africans came to South Carolina in 1526 as part of a Spanish expedition, headed by Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, from the West Indies. Africans had been part of earlier European expeditions and explorations in the Indies, primarily as personal servants. Not until the seventeenth century was there a significant African presence in Carolina, although certainly that presence existed in the Caribbean. In 1627, Barbados was first settled by several dozen men in search of gold; roughly one quarter of the explorers were Africans.² As the indigenous Indian population on the island declined, Europeans turned to Africans as a source of labor.³ When sugar was introduced to the island, the demand for laborers rose again, and, because the ideal workers came from a large, renewable source on a trading route and would--or could be made to--work for the longest possible time interval, Europeans turned to West Africans to fill, albeit involuntarily, their labor needs. By the second generation of settlement, blacks represented a majority on Barbados--there were roughly thirty thousand slaves and black laborers and twenty thousand whites.

By 1670, Barbadian riches were confined to a few large planters; the closed economy and the destruction wrought by natural disasters prompted approximately four percent of the

¹Peter Wood, *Black Majority* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974), 132.

²*Ibid.*, 7.

³*Ibid.*, 5.

population to quit the island in that year alone in search of greater economic opportunity. Younger sons, who were not to receive any familial land, small planters forced off their land, political exiles, and criminals left the island, nearly always taking slaves with them. By 1670, these Barbadians constituted a significant segment of the Carolina coastal population. Indeed, in the years between 1670 and 1690, fifty-four percent of white immigrants to South Carolina were from Barbados.

The Barbadian emigrants who came to Carolina hailed from all social classes, so they were able to keep their island social structure intact on the American mainland by assuming the same roles in colonial Carolina that they had played on the island. One of the aspects that they transplanted to the coast was a dependence on, and preference for, African slave labor in the cultivation of a single labor-intensive staple crop; although South Carolinians grew indigo and sea island, or long-staple, cotton, they focused primarily on rice.⁴

South Carolina and Georgia each have a relatively short coastline, but the two states have between them chains of over two hundred sea islands. Rice cultivation is a highly specialized process, requiring a large labor force--as compared with short-staple cotton or tobacco--and access to fresh water within ten to twenty miles of the coast. The water in this area is affected by changes in the tides, which were critical for flooding and draining the plains before more modern irrigation techniques were used; the coastal and island regions of the two states are abundant in marshes, which fit the specifications for rice cultivation.⁵ Like earlier rice planters in South Carolina, Georgia rice cultivators were members of the elite

⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 5.

planter aristocracy; often they had inherited their material assets from Carolinians of earlier generations. Julia Floyd Smith, in her general history *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860*, commented on the planters' background:

During the nineteenth century the rice magnates of coastal Georgia, like their forebears and relatives along the Carolina coast, constituted the elite of the planter aristocracy. . . . None among them had risen from the small-scale farmer or overseer class that gradually expanded holdings in land and slaves. With few exceptions, the rice planters inherited their status and property from older generations of Carolinians who migrated to the Georgia coast to develop the rice frontier.⁶

Additionally, the exact border between the two states had long been disputed; Carolinians and Georgians moved freely back and forth along the coast and mingled with residents of the other state.⁷ Georgia's founding trustees prohibited, in 1735, the importation of "Black slaves or Negroes," but freeholders defied the legislation by bringing slaves from South Carolina under the pretense that they were hired laborers. By 1766, the Trustees had passed an act which lifted the ban on the importation of slaves from Africa into Georgia.

The dependence of the coastal and island areas of the two states on rice contributed to their preference for African slaves. Many West African peoples were familiar with growing, harvesting, and preparing rice. For that reason, many planters sought African laborers from the Windward and Gold Coasts, Sierra Leone, Senegambia, and particularly Angola, because they had the precise knowledge of crop cultivation which the Euro-Americans wanted to learn and utilize.⁸ Additionally, Africans seemed to be immune to some of the tropical diseases that ravaged the coast, particularly during the summer months. Coastal planters cultivated

⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

⁷Louis De Vorsey, Jr., *The Georgia-South Carolina Boundary: a Problem in Historical Geography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 1-3.

⁸Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 114.

immense volumes of rice and depended wholly on their African slaves for its production.⁹ As rice became an even more popular cash crop, whites imported still more blacks; by 1708, the majority of South Carolina's population was black.¹⁰ Georgia never reached a black majority at the state level, but African-Americans accounted for about seventy percent of the coastal population in 1860.¹¹

Rice and sea island cotton are both considered wet-culture crops, which demand a larger labor force for cultivating, irrigating, and harvesting than does a dry-culture crop like tobacco or short-staple cotton.¹² In fact, "some of the largest plantations of the antebellum era were located along the Rice Coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Not only were the landholdings of these estates extensive, but the average number of slaves on a rice-producing plantation was slightly more than two hundred."¹³ Of the eighty-eight American slaveholders who held three hundred or more slaves in 1860, twenty-nine were rice planters; of the fourteen masters who owned five hundred or more slaves, nine were rice planters; the only man who owned over one thousand slaves was Joshua Ward, a rice planter from Georgetown County, South Carolina.¹⁴ In contrast to the rice planters, the representative nineteenth-century planter owned between twenty and thirty slaves.¹⁵

Planters along the coast quickly adopted the task system on their rice plantations.

⁹Before 1865, the rice cultivated in low country Georgia and South Carolina accounted for about ninety percent of the rice produced in the United States. Smith, 4.

¹⁰Wood, 26.

¹¹John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: the Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7.

¹²Smith, 10.

¹³Vlach, 187.

¹⁴Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984) 34.

¹⁵Vlach, 9.

Under the task system, each slave was placed in a group according to his abilities, age, and physical condition. A small child would be classified as a quarter-hand, while a twenty-five-year-old man in good condition would be a full hand. Each slave was then assigned a particular job, or task, based upon his classification. Typically, a task was a particular amount of land upon which the slave was to perform certain activities, such as planting, weeding, or harvesting. For a full hand, a task was about one quarter of an acre laid out in a square that measured 105 feet by 105 feet.¹⁶ When a slave finished his task, his work day was normally completed; if a slave did not finish his daily task, he could be punished. A Charleston planter related to Captain Basil Hall in 1827 that planters "don't care what [slaves] do when their tasks are over--we lose sight of them till the next day."¹⁷ The task system thus rewarded short-term, immediate performance with leisure time. Slaves, however, generally took a cooperative, group-oriented approach to tasks; often more able slaves, those who finished their tasks quickly, would help those less able complete their assignments.¹⁸

Rice plantation slaves and slaves on cotton or sugar plantations rarely came into contact with each other; rice slaves might be sold from one rice plantation to another, but were rarely sold off to other types of plantations.¹⁹ The slaves on coastal rice plantations often had limited interaction with slaves on neighboring plantations, and their geographic isolation nearly eliminated their contact with slaves on inland plantations. On Saint Helena Island in 1860, for example, probably fewer than half of the 2,000 slaves had ever been off

¹⁶Guion Griffis Johnson, *A Social History of the Sea Islands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 86.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁸*Down by the Riverside*, 39.

¹⁹Charles Joyner, *Remember Me: Slave Life in Coastal Georgia* (Atlanta: Georgia Humanities Council, 1989) 9.

the island. Similarly, because the ratio of blacks to whites ran high on the coastal plantations, slaves saw more of each other than of the whites around them. They were thus able to maintain elements of their West African culture and customs more easily than if they had been assimilated into a more heterogenous society like inland Piedmont and Tidewater Virginia and Maryland slaves.²⁰

The combination of the task system, which gave coastal slaves some degree of autonomy, and the physical and cultural isolation of rice-planting slaves created an environment conducive to the establishment and preservation of a slave culture. Slaves used their "off times" activities to protect and fortify themselves, their children, and the community from the pressures of life in bondage.²¹ At home, a slave family temporarily shut out the master and the precariousness of their situation. For an afternoon or an evening, children used names and words of African derivation, listened to stories, helped their mothers and sisters cook, clean, and tend their own gardens, danced to their fathers' and brothers' fiddle music, and played games with members of the larger, interracial plantation community.²²

The time alone with their families played a crucial role in the children's social, emotional, and even physical development. Masters knew that obedient slaves--whether that obedience was inspired by fear, by affection, or by bribery--were better, more productive workers. To ensure that they had a supply of compliant adults, planters started inculcating in children the principles by which they expected their slaves to act. Slave parents, though,

²⁰Johnson, 127.

²¹*Down by the Riverside*, 140.

²²*Ibid.*, 126.

fought to instill in their children a sense of pride and cultural awareness. The result was the formation of a discernible low country slave community and culture, which played a major role in educating and socializing slave children. The slave community in the coastal and sea island regions of South Carolina and Georgia drew from African cultural elements as it adapted to the Euro-American society in which it was placed. Although this community development is not unique to slave families and children in the low country, some of the customs derived from an African heritage were preserved in Gullah traditions after they were diluted and lost among inland slaves more exposed to mainstream American culture. Additionally, some aspects of the coastal slave community life and culture developed uniquely because of the widespread usage of the task system and the large plantations on which tidewater Carolina and Georgia slaves lived.

Chapter Two Slaves' Homes and Gardens

"God bless the house and keep the soul."¹

-Hagar Brown, former slave from Georgetown County, South Carolina

Housing was of especial importance in the lives of slaves. In their homes and quarters, the family temporarily became its own entity, for a short time not subject to direct regulation by their master. In the slave houses, African and African-American traditions were passed down through generations and culture more fully developed. Although the physical environment into which coastal plantation slaves were born varied from plantation to plantation based on the physical landscape, most of their houses shared common characteristics. Nearly all coastal rice plantations were built on reclaimed wetlands and marshes, and the coastal soil of Georgia and South Carolina is sandy, unlike the richer soil of the Virginia and Maryland Tidewater, the Mississippi River Valley and Delta, or the red clay hills of Piedmont South Carolina and Georgia.

A plantation slaveowner, regardless of what crop he cultivated, kept his slaves in quarters smaller than his own, because he knew he needed to keep his slaves in a humble position. To further this goal, he often built the Big--or sometimes just bigger--House on a high point of land, usually set apart from the slaves' residences. By the middle of the eighteenth century, slave quarters separate from the Big House were common across the South. The masters' self-imposed removal from the vicinity of the slaves meant that bondsmen had opportunity to take control of many of their own family and household issues.

¹*Down by the Riverside*, 126.

It was in the slave quarters "beyond their master's immediate scrutiny, at the margins of the plantation and in the thickets beyond its boundary lines, [that] slaves created their own landscape."² Typically masters either thought the landscape their slaves created was insignificant, or simply did not notice the subtlety. In South Carolina, African slaves arriving in the eighteenth century constructed segregated housing of African-style dwellings. The practice of African-influenced building continued into the nineteenth century. Okra, a slave on James Couper's Hopeton plantation in Georgia, built an African-inspired house for himself.³ In allowing slaves to keep African-style dwellings, coastal planters unintentionally helped slaves preserve their West African heritage.

The creation of slave landscapes was a slave reaction to the plans enacted around them and upon them by white landowners. One of the techniques they used involved counteracting the masters' order and logic. The Georgian architectural style emphasized linearity of buildings and their arrangement on the land. On J. J. Smith's Beaufort, South Carolina, sea island cotton plantation, the slave village had a traditional row of buildings, but slaves constructed all of the houses so that they sat at irregular angles to each other.⁴

The housing of slaves on rice plantations compared favorably with that of other slaves, of poor Southern whites, and of free Northern workers; "the wealthy planter of coastal Georgia provided elaborate dwellings more often than did the smaller slaveholders."⁵ The houses helped support and sustain the slaves' sense of family. On the Waccamaw, a belt

²Viach, 13.

³Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers Project, Works Progress Administration, *Dreams and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 179.

⁴*Ibid.*, 14.

⁵Smith, 126, 130.

of plantations in All Saints Parish, South Carolina, each slave family typically had its own house, rather than being housed in long-houses or sharing a single building with another family.⁶ The primary implication of families having their own houses is that some minimum amount of privacy was guaranteed. In Friendfield Village, on the south edge of the Waccamaw, for example, each slave cabin had a steep roof with a loft accessible by a ladder from the floor. Most families used the loft as a sleeping area for the children, insuring that they, too, had a modicum of privacy.⁷ Sir Charles Lyell's 1846 description of slave houses on Butler's Island, Georgia, tells of a similar situation there. He writes of cabins "neat, and whitewashed, all floored with wood, each with an apartment called the hall, two sleeping rooms, and a loft for the children."⁸

Coastal planters typically used hall-and-parlor houses for their slaves, which gave each family two rooms--a large kitchen and workroom and a smaller bedroom, sometimes with an attached sleeping loft. These houses were longer and deeper than the single-pen or two-unit--two one-room, single-pen houses joined under one roof--generally used in other slave regions.⁹ The houses masters specified might have reminded slaves of African homes. West African dwellings usually measured ten feet by ten feet or less, had a single doorway as their only opening, and were used primarily for sleeping. The planters, in providing slaves with homes so similar to African ones, "unwittingly abetted the perpetuation of African proxemic

⁶*Down by the Riverside*, 124-126.

⁷*Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁸Johnson, 90.

⁹Vlach, 161.

traditions."¹⁰ The cotton, tobacco, and sugar planters of other Southern regions usually specified that their slave cabins be built of logs. Along the Carolina and Georgia coast, though, masters turned to materials more local and those seen as more healthy, although log cabins were not unknown.¹¹ On some coastal plantations with brick-firing facilities, the slaves' houses were made of brick. Many planters, though, chose to use tabby. The abundance of local oyster shells made the production of tabby easy and its supply plentiful. Additionally, it was durable enough to withstand the hurricanes and warm-weather storms that buffeted the coast.

On plantations, the same principles of Georgian architecture that dictated how a planter laid out his house and land applied to the slave quarters. Even those slaves who thwarted their masters' plans by building houses at irregular angles to each other or who built in African-inspired styles tended to live along a central path or narrow road simply referred to as the Street. The Street was the location of slave interaction unsupervised by the master; it was here that the sense of community was defined. The Street served a practical purpose, too. Maintaining a communal dirt yard is "traditional in most West African villages. . . . This smooth yard is functional on the sea islands as well as in Africa: keeping it grassless helps to eliminate insects and provides a clean, unlittered surface where children can play and elders [can socialize]."¹² In slaves' stories, the Street did have lighthearted connotations for children; they recalled the Street as a place where they played and where they received treats.

Sam Mitchell, an ex-slave who grew up on Woodlawn plantation on Lady's Island,

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 165-166.

¹¹Smith, 121.

¹²Patricia Jones-Jackson, *When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 8.

South Carolina, recalled the geography of living arrangements there: "De slave lib on de Street, each cabin had two room."¹³ Sam Polite, who grew up in bondage on the Fripp plantation on Saint Helena Island, Georgia, remembered that "W'en I been a leetle boy, I play en Street--shoot marble play aa'my and sech t'ing."¹⁴ On the Weston plantations along the Waccamaw, planter Plowden C. J. Weston's daughter Emily, visited the Street on the twenty-eighth of December each year to give gingerbread cakes to the children there.¹⁵

Not all slaves in coastal Carolina and Georgia lived along the Street. When asked by an interviewer for her recollections of the Street, Abbey Mishow, who grew up as a slave on Waterford plantation in Georgetown County, South Carolina, replied:

I don't know nothing about de Street on de plantation, and what dey do dere, cause I ain't had no 'casion for go dere. I raise in de yard, I didn't wear de kind ob clothes de field-hand chillen wear, and I get my dinner from de kitchen. I don't know nothing 'bout crops cause we summered.¹⁶

Though the interviewer's account of Mishow's comments does not reveal what her exact occupation was, one assumes she was a house slave. Because only about a quarter of the slaves in the South worked as domestic servants rather than as field hands, her comments reveal a less common experience.¹⁷

Along the Street, most cabins had a small patch of land behind them on which the planter allowed his bondspeople to cultivate their own crops. The garden plot typically

¹³George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vol. 3, *South Carolina Narratives, Part 3* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), 200.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁵*Down by the Riverside*, 135.

¹⁶*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 198.

¹⁷Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 328.

covered about one-quarter acre, the same area as a full hand's task. On the land,

most [coastal] families planted three or four rows of corn and put the rest in potatoes. They ate part of the corn, but fed most of it to the pig and chickens which each hand was permitted to keep. . . . Nor did the hands usually eat their stock and poultry, but sold it to the master or the island storekeeper or to merchants in Beaufort.¹⁸

Masters let slaves sell their goods as an attempt to motivate them to use their off-task time efficiently and in a manner that the master could sanction.¹⁹ Masters often supplied their own tables with their slaves' produce. In addition to receiving produce for his own use, planters generally found providing garden plots advantageous, because the produce slaves grew--cabbages, collards, turnip greens, peas, and sweet potatoes--supplied them with essential vitamins and nutrients. Aside from physical implications and the benefits of social control masters received, coastal slaves profited, both in monetary and in social terms, from the garden plots. Julia Floyd Smith suggests that slaves' use of their leisure time "to socialize; to make handcrafts, casting nets, and canoes; to hunt and fish, or to cultivate their garden plots" and the consequent sale of their wares helped coastal slaves maintain "a lifestyle somewhat different and perhaps less debilitating and demeaning emotionally than slaves in other plantation belts. Though they were more isolated and less acculturated than slaves in other areas, they could claim a modicum of self-esteem."²⁰

Typically, the woman of the slave family took responsibility for the family patch. With the children's help, she worked the garden, marketed the produce, and took charge of the money she received in exchange. Children here, then, watched their mothers taking

¹⁸Johnson, 86.

¹⁹*Down by the Riverside*, 52.

²⁰Smith, 62.

charge of an area of the family's welfare and well-being without the master's direct intervention. With the money she earned, a mother could supplement her family's rations, furnish her house, or purchase small luxuries. A slave family could thus break the cycle of paternalism in some small, but still important way. Even through the cultivation of vegetables and the presence of some of the same vegetation, slaves retained some of their cultural connections to Africa. Rosa Grant, whose grandfather was a slave brought from Africa, remembered that her grandfather told her that in Africa "dey gadduh wile okra an palmettuh cabbage fuh food frum duh forres;"²¹ both okra and palmetto cabbage were available and eaten in coastal areas. Though they relied on the planter for the land on which they could build their houses and tend their gardens, slaves conducted both enterprises away from the master. The home and garden gave slave parents time alone with their children: time to teach and share their experiences, both African and American.

²¹*Drums and Shadows*, 144.

Chapter Three Slaves' Childhood Development

"Such bright, happy faces when three or four years old, and from that age to ten or twelve . . . such frank and confiding manners, as to be very engaging."¹

--Sir Charles Lyell during a mid-nineteenth century to Hopeton Plantation (Georgia)

The papers of John E. Fripp, a Saint Helena Island, Georgia, planter, record births on his plantation from 1802 to 1860. There are complete records for twenty women; these twenty women ranged in age from fifteen to twenty-two. Two women each had ten children, one had nine, two eight, three seven, one five, four four, four three, and three women each had two children. Infant mortality was still high--Fripp records that Hetty, one of the women who bore ten children, lost four of her offspring in infancy; Olive had eight children, four of whom died in infancy. The other women, though, each lost only one or two.² In Georgia, the slave population in 1850 was 381,682; in 1860, the population had increased by over eighty thousand.³ By the nineteenth century, low country slaves followed this pattern of dramatic natural increase.

Typically, planters urged that slave mothers take proper care of themselves during pregnancy and pay close attention to their newborns. To this end, a planter might reward the plantation midwife--on coastal plantations the midwife was a slave--seventy-five cents for each delivery during the year. They might also promote proper prenatal and infant care by

¹Johnson, 139.

²*Ibid.*, 101.

³Smith, 104.

giving mothers one dollar at Christmas for each of their living children.⁴ To help insure that they had as many healthy infants as possible, slaveowners established maternity wards in slave hospitals. Roswell King, Jr., a Georgia rice plantation overseer, suggested that planters provide a hospital on each plantation, "with proper nurses and apartments for lying-in women, for the men, and a nursery."⁵ Hospitals devoted to slave care were more common on plantations with a sizeable slave population; because of the large numbers of slaves on coastal rice plantations, mothers and newborn babies were more likely to spend time resting in a building designated as a hospital than slaves on inland plantations. On the Jehossee Island, South Carolina, rice plantation belonging to William Aiken, Jr., he established three hospitals for the care of his over seven hundred slaves, one of which was used exclusively as a maternity ward.⁶

Because most women had a month to rest after giving birth, they had a chance to recover from childbirth and establish some sort of relationship with their newborn children.⁷ Additionally, many women were assigned half tasks until their babies were weaned, usually at about eight months.⁸ As long as a woman nursed her child, she left her field work at prescribed intervals to feed her baby or had an older child bring the infant to her in the fields for feeding.⁹ Henry Brown, a former South Carolina low country slave, described the

⁴Johnson, 97.

⁵Vlach, 144.

⁶*Ibid.*, 144-145.

⁷Ralph Beta Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 101.

⁸Johnson, 82.

⁹*Ibid.*, 97.

routine:

The babies were taken to the negro house and the old women and young colored girls who were big enough to lift them took care of them. At one o'clock the babies were taken to the field to be nursed, then they were brought back to the negro house until the mothers finished their work, then they would come for them.¹⁰

Planters encouraged mothers to take responsibility for their children because of their own financial interests in having a large, healthy slave population. The routines masters developed gave slave mothers a chance to spend time with their babies and to establish a caring relationship with their children. The slaveowners' priorities helped the slaves form families which would play a role in the child's life.

The coastal and sea island family exposed slave children to African and Gullah influences from birth; many African traditions attended birth and childhood. According to West African beliefs, a child born feet foremost was destined to be lucky or wise.¹¹ Babies born with a caul were held to be gifted with second sight; they were often taught the special lore of the conjurers from childhood.¹² Former coastal slaves emphasized that a "child born in a caul will be gifted with the ability to see 'ghosses' and 'ha'nts'".¹³ Carrie Hamilton, a former Yamacraw, Georgia, slave recalled that her "mudduh use tuh tell me all kine uh ting cuz I wuz bawn wid a caul an wuz diffrunt frum duh res."¹⁴ Nathaniel John Lewis, a former low country Georgia slave, remembered that he was doubly gifted with knowledge of spirits

¹⁰George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vol. 2, *South Carolina Narratives, Part I* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), 119.

¹¹Mary A. Twining and Keith E. Baird, eds., *Sea Island Roots* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1991), 30.

¹²*Down by the Riverside*, 146. A caul is a part of the amnion which sometimes covers the head of a child at birth.

¹³Twining, 29.

¹⁴*Drums and Shadows*, 29.

and conjure because he was "the seventh child *and* bawn with a caul."¹⁵ Sophie Davis, a former White Bluff, Georgia, slave told an interviewer what she had been taught about babies born with teeth: "Dey will hab bad luck all deah libes. Dat sho wuk out. Deah wuz one boy bawn dat way wut lib right yuh in W[h]ite Bluff and he wine [*sic*] up by bein in duh chain-gang an dat sho nuff bad luck."¹⁶

Even as small children, slaves encountered superstitious traditions other than those accompanying birth. The community concerned itself with the children's welfare and with preventing spirits from negatively affecting children. Young slaves on Saint Simon's Island, Georgia, were protected by etching a cross in ashes on their forehead.¹⁷ Slave children on the same island were warned to stay away from Old Grace's cabin because she was allegedly a "hag" who had eaten children in her native land.¹⁸ Bessie Reese, who had grown up as a slave in low country Georgia, remembered that her mother "nebu would let us go tuh bed at night widout leabin plenty uh watuh in duh pails fuh duh spirits tuh drink wile yuh sleep. Ef yuh dohn leab no watuh dey wohn leh yuh res good."¹⁹ Coastal slaves passed babies and small children over the casket of a deceased relative to seal the spirit of the dead and prevent its unpleasant intrusion in the lives of the younger slaves.²⁰ Such folk beliefs were not confined to coastal Georgia and South Carolina, but because of the homogeneity of the slave

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁷Betsy Fancher, *The Lost Legacy of Georgia's Golden Isles* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1971), 49. Although the practice is similar to, and may have been inspired by, the ancient Anglican tradition of the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday, the purpose of the practice within the slave community was to protect children from harm and distress. The Christian practice serves instead as a reminder of human mortality.

¹⁸*Remember Me*, 43.

¹⁹*Drums and Shadows*, 59.

²⁰Smith, 180.

population there, and the continued presence of African-born slaves, children in Gullah communities were particularly exposed to West African traditions even within American environments.

Similarly, African and Gullah practices heavily influenced how a child was named. Many parents followed African precedents and named their children according to the circumstances of the child's birth--the day of the week or the month of the year, the agricultural season, or any other contemporary factor.²¹ Thursday Jones, a former low country Georgia slave, explained that his parents "name me dat way jis cuz uh happen tuh be bawn on Tuesday, I guess. Sech tings seems tuh be in our fambly. I hab an uncle whose name is Monday Collins. It seem tuh come duh fus ting tuh folks' mine tuh name duh babies fuh duh day dey is bawn on."²² Some masters insisted on naming slave children themselves. If a master chose a slave's name, the name tended to reflect the master's interest; names were frequently of classical, historical, literary, or biblical derivation. Many slaves named by their masters had two names; they used the name given by the master in public situations and used a basket name--usually a word or name of African origin--with their parents and kin.²³ Slaves used these Gullah words to name their children and introduce them into the slave community.²⁴ Slaves who insisted on naming their own children asserted control over a critical area of their lives. One's name is his most basic label of identity, and by naming their own children, slave parents accomplished no trivial feat.

²¹Twining, 2.

²²*Drums and Shadows*, 51.

²³*Down by the Riverside*, 217.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 224.

When coastal slave children were about eight months old, planters considered them old enough to be separated from their mothers. The care of children was divided between mothers, plantation nurses, and older children doing their share of "minding child."²⁵ During the day, while their mothers labored in the fields, children were kept in a day nursery or what former Horry County, South Carolina, slave Sabe Rutledge described as the "chillun house."²⁶ The children in the nursery were minded by a superannuated slave woman and one or several juvenile slaves too young to work in the fields. British naval officer Captain Basil Hall, in an 1828 visit to a plantation near Charleston, described "a sober old matron in charge of the three dozen shining urchins, collected together in a house near the center of the village. Over the fire hung a large pot of hominy, a preparation of Indian corn, making ready for the little folks' supper, and a very merry, happy-looking party they seemed."²⁷

One of the major facets of the children's nursery was that children got to spend their days in the company of other children. Margaret Bryant, who grew up as a slave in Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, recalled that "my Pa sister, Ritta. One had that job. Nuss the chillun. Chillun house. One woman nuss all the chillun while they ma in the field--rice field. All size chillun."²⁸ The house also served, for some young slaves, as a training site where they learned the responsibilities of caring for their younger brothers and sisters, both fictive and real. Maria Jenkins, a former slave from Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, remembered that her sister Rachel taught her how to care for babies: "[s]he teach me to

²⁵Johnson, 136.

²⁶George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vol. 3, *South Carolina Narratives, Part 4* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), 62.

²⁷Johnson, 138.

²⁸*South Carolina Narratives, Part 1*, 146.

wash de baby clean and put on he dipa, and if I ain't do um good [s]he konk my head."²⁹

Some young male slaves left the nursery to take other jobs. Some left the plantation to learn the skills necessary in rice cultivation. South Carolina rice planter David Doar noted the key role that slave craftsmen might play at rice mills: "These men, many of them, were no mean artisans. Generally, there were some intelligent boys or sons of some favorite slave who were sent to the city and put to trade with such firms as Cameron and Mustard" where they completed a six- or seven-year apprenticeship.³⁰ Most slaves, though, spent their time closer to home. Amos Gadsden, who grew up in Green Pond, South Carolina, "was trained by old Tony for yard boy before the War. I looked out that no harm came to the older children. . . ."³¹ Henry Williams, one of William Cole's slaves at Oakland Point, Saint Mary's Island, Georgia, described a similar training situation: "Wen I wuz bout twelve, I hep Daddy Patty in his tannin yahd ovuh theah on the watuh by the cimiterry."³² Sam Mitchell described other chores--"little boy and old man mind cow. Little girl and old 'ooman mind baby." Mitchell remembered his own assignments on Woodlawn plantation, on Lady's Island, South Carolina: "I staa't for mind cow w'en I been nine year old. W'en I been twelve, I have for staa't wuk in field or cutting maash or splitting rail."³³

Slaves' testimonies agree that, typically, children were not sent to the field until they were thirteen or fourteen. Sam Polite told an interviewer that on B. Fripp's Saint Helena

²⁹South Carolina Narratives, Part 3, 28.

³⁰David Doar, *Rice and Rice Planting in the South Carolina Low Country* (Charleston: The Charleston Museum, 1936), 30-31.

³¹George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vol. 2, *South Carolina Narratives, Part II*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), 93.

³²*Drums and Shadows*, 188.

³³South Carolina Narratives, Part 3, 202. "Cutting maash" refers to the process of draining and clearing marsh land for use as a rice field.

Island, Georgia, plantation, "chillen don't wuk in field 'til twelve or t'irteen year old."³⁴ Until they reached that age, most were assigned light chores. Their jobs could include pulling weeds, caring for younger children, picking up trash, and washing dishes.³⁵ Joe Rutherford summed up his situation on the Morris Island, South Carolina, sea island cotton plantation where he was born around 1846: "We had a good house or hut to live in, and my work was to drive cows till I was old 'nough to work in de fields, when I was thirteen. Then I plowed, hoed cotton, and hoed corn, till last year of war. . . ."³⁶ On coastal plantations where children started working in the fields before they turned thirteen, they generally counted as quarter- or half-hands.³⁷ When they began more intensive field work, older children were classified as half- or three quarter-hands. On the Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, plantation where Prince Smith grew up, "de shree fourth han' was given one whole tas' which consists of twelve rows. All de older chillun was included in dis group."³⁸

Some slaves who were selected for positions as house slaves began training for service in the Big House at the same time their peers began to be introduced to field work. Only about one-quarter of bondsmen ever worked as domestic servants, but their experiences are certainly important.³⁹ Lucretia Heyward, a Beaufort slave, remembered that "w'en I been little gal, I wuk in de house. Wuk all day. I polish knife and fork, mek bed, sweep floor,

³⁴*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 271.

³⁵Johnson, 82.

³⁶*South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, 55.

³⁷Flanders, 101.

³⁸*South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, 117. A whole hand's task was twenty-four or twenty-five rows, so the children classified as three-quarter hands worked an area about half the size of a whole hand's.

³⁹Genovese, 328.

nebber hab time for play game. W'en I git bigger, dey send me to school to Miss Crocker to learn to be seamstress."⁴⁰ Ephriam [sic] Lawrence, who grew up in bondage on Edisto Island, South Carolina, described his childhood: "I raise up under de Murray--all my generation belong to de Murray. Dey know how to treat slave. Ain't lick um much, hardly any. Chillun hab easy time. All I been require to do was tote coal to Masser when he ready for light. Adam Mack and me, we been de fire boy."⁴¹ Lydia, a former slave at Charles Manigault's Gowrie plantation in Georgia, remembered that she had had several years of training before she assumed her duties as a house girl at age twelve.⁴²

In addition to being assigned to household duties and chores, some slave children were assigned to be playmates of the planters' children. Often the children assigned to be white children's playmates were children of slaves already working as house servants.⁴³ This close relationship between black and white children had implications for both races. A Northern visitor remarked that "the children of the planters, brought up on the plantations, [were] allowed to run in the woods with the little negroes."⁴⁴ There was a serious ramification of this close interracial relationship for slaves. Thomas Goodwater, a Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, slave born in 1855, told an interviewer working for the Federal Writers' Project that his father had been owned by Lias Winning, "a mean man. He couldn' lick pa cus dey

⁴⁰*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 279.

⁴¹*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 94.

⁴²Flanders, 105.

⁴³*Remember Me*, 28.

⁴⁴*Down by the Riverside*, 208.

grew up togedder or at least he didn' try."⁴⁵ The line between black and white, then, could be blurred for slaves who grew up with white playmates who later owned them. However, even slaves who grew up with white playmates reached an age when they had to acknowledge and follow certain acceptable patterns for interracial relationships as dictated by Southern society. Former Green Pond, South Carolina, slave Amos Gadsden summarized: "I grew up with the white children in the family, but I was trained to step aside at all times for white people."⁴⁶

Interracial relationships were not the only aspects of coastal slaves' lives that changed as they approached adolescence. Certain changes marked the beginning of the transition from childhood to early adulthood, and slave children were conscious of their bondage and some of its consequences. Richard Mack remembered that he "was born in Limestone, Virginia. My first master was Green Bobo. I was sold when I was ten years old; not really sold, but sold on a paper that said if he didn't take care of me, I would come back."⁴⁷ Mack knew no later than age ten that he was property to be bought and sold on a piece of paper. Regardless of how carefree his childhood may have been in other ways, he always understood clearly that his status in his master's eyes was as an asset and a tool for the planter to use in his quest for personal wealth.

⁴⁵South Carolina Narratives, Part 2, 167.

⁴⁶South Carolina Narratives, Part 2, 91-92.

⁴⁷George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 1, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Washington Narratives (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1979), 386.

Chapter Four

Safeguarding Slave Children's Physical Well-Being

"Colonel Ward keep a nice place. . . . Gi[v]e 'em rice--peas. Four cook for chillun."¹
--Ellen Godfrey, former slave from Georgetown County, South Carolina

It was in a master's best interest to protect the health of his slaves. Slaves were an investment; and because the planter needed a large labor force to operate his plantation and because after 1808 slaves were difficult if not impossible to import, a master valued them as he would any asset. Although illness was common throughout slave regions in the United States, the low country was considered particularly unhealthy. As a result, more planters in the coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina than elsewhere made hospitals standard features on their plantations.² Slaveowners also practiced preventative medicine. On Weehaw plantation, in Georgia, master Henry A. Middleton, Jr., regularly had all the black children vaccinated to prevent epidemics, particularly of smallpox and cholera.³ Despite planters' best efforts, the proportion of children in the total number of deaths was high, although the slave population continued to grow through natural increase.⁴

After cholera epidemics ravaged Louis Manigault's Argyle Island plantation in 1852 and 1854, he bought 771 acres of "high land" on the Georgia mainland. He used the land

¹*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 161.

²Vlach, 144.

³Johnson, 95.

⁴*Ibid.*, 98. Of course, the death rate among white infants in the region was also high. The death rates for infants of both races tended to be higher in this region than in less "miasmatic" slave regions of the country.

for cholera camps "and for the summer residence of the Negro children."⁵ Because the low country region was considered so miasmatic and malarial, coastal slave children were more likely to live on a plantation with at least one slave hospital and more likely to be taken to a healthier region for the sickly summer months than children growing up in bondage elsewhere. But this greater likelihood did not mean that most coastal slaves summered further inland. Many of their masters did, though. Most of the planter families retained residences in Charleston or Savannah, and many had homes away from the coast where they spent their summers. Low country slaves were much more likely to be left, for days at a time during the cooler months, and weeks, or even months at a time during the hot season, in the care of an overseer while the planters were absent. The absence of a full-time master gave tidewater slaves more autonomy to decide how to live their daily lives. Even though the master returned for regular consultations with his overseer, slaves were not subject to his supervision on a day-to-day basis; the family and community operated, at least temporarily, as their own entity.

Slaves received tangible benefits from their masters' absence, too. Ben Horry, one of Joshua Ward's slaves who spent time on Ward's Brookgreen and Springfield plantations along the Waccamaw in South Carolina remembered that:

Marse Josh and Miss Bess had come from French Broad where they summered it. they brought a great deal of this cloth they call blue drilling to make a suit for every boy big enough to wear a suit of clothes and a pair of shoes for everyone. I thought *that* the happiest 'set up' I had in boyhood. Blue drilling pants and coat and shoe.⁶

The distribution of clothing and shoes, or the material with which slaves or a seamstress

⁵*Ibid.*, 94.

⁶*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 317.

could make them, underscored planters' authority.⁷ Some slaves, both children and adults, circumvented their masters' plans by walking around without shoes or clothes. Because of the oppressive heat of the coastal summers, many young slaves went about the plantation naked or in simple shifts. Thomas Goodwater, born in 1855 in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, told an interviewer that "in hot wedder gals en' boys go in der under shirts en' nothin' else."⁸ Many Northern observers were shocked because slave mothers allowed their children to roam around the plantation nude during the summer until the young slaves were about twelve years old.⁹ To the slaves, this must simply have seemed a logical continuation of their African practices. Certainly it is inaccurate to assume that all African men and women went about their daily lives naked, but their garments were designed with the heat in which they worked and the jobs they performed as considerations. Coastal slaves adapted their clothing to their American environment, and although their behavior was not always an exact extension of the equivalent African practice, they were guided by the same principles of comfort and practicality.

Much as planters were involved in the provision of clothing and shoes, they took an interest in feeding their slaves. Well-fed slaves could be counted on to be more productive workers with a longer lifespan, so certainly their reasons for intervention were not wholly humanitarian. On most coastal plantations, masters engaged separate cooks for children and for adults. Joshua Ward, the largest slaveowner in the United States according to the 1860 census, employed four full-time cooks for the over four hundred children on his seven

⁷*Down by the Riverside*, 110.

⁸*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 166-167.

⁹*Johnson*, 139.

plantations.¹⁰ Ellen Godfrey, born in 1837 on one of Ward's plantations described this aspect of her childhood: "Colonel Ward keep a nice place. . . . Gi[v]e 'em rice--peas. Four cook for chillun. One nuss. Make the boy go get 'em clam. That same Dr. Ward grandpa. Great big sack o' clam! Give you cow clabber."¹¹ The children's cook typically prepared the midday meal; families generally ate the evening meal together.

At eight months, children began a diet of vegetables, milk, and starches. On some plantations, children's rations were given to the cook daily, on some weekly. Planters made some effort to provide a range of nutrients to their slave children. Plowden C. J. Weston detailed the rations he gave the children's cook on Hagley, one of his South Carolina rice plantations:

To the children's cook:
during potato time, daily except Sunday, two quarts potatoes
during grits time, one pint grits per child, one-half pint salt to cook
fifteen pounds meat to cook Tuesday and Friday
one-half pint small rice to cook Tuesday and Friday, April through October
two quarts molasses to cook every Thursday
three pints flour every Saturday

At Christmas, Weston added an extra pound-and-a-half of fresh meat, one-and-a-half pounds of salt meat, one pint of molasses, and two quarts of small rice to the children's weekly rations.¹² Sam Mitchell, a former slave from Woodlawn plantation on Lady's Island, South Carolina, recalled that weekly, on Tuesdays, "de Master gib each slave a peck ob corn. W'en potato dug, we git potato. Two time in de year we git six yaa's ob cloth, calico in spring and homespun in de winter. Once a year we git shoe. De slave had 'bout two task ob

¹⁰*Down by the Riverside*, 34.

¹¹*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2.*, 161.

¹²*Down by the Riverside*, 93-94.

land to cultivate for se'f in w'at call Nigger field. Could raise one pig."¹³ Although slave narratives do not suggest that slave families could have supported themselves without rations from their masters, the food families raised in their backyard gardens was a crucial nutritional supplement to slave children's diets.¹⁴

Some masters engaged in paternalistic routines regarding the distribution of food. Former Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, slave Maria Jenkins remembered that she went "up to Maussa' house ebery day for de milk for we; and dey give we clabba and cow peas and ting out de garden. We git ebery evening a bushel ob corn grind and hand ober to de nurse, and [the master] sift out de flo[u]r. . . . And dey gib we uh big piece ob meat and sometime chicken. Rachel cook in de big pot for we chillun, and [s]he dip um out."¹⁵ On this plantation, because slave children had to go up to the master's house to fetch their food for the next day, the planter emphasized again the dependence of bondsmen on their masters for slaves' basic means of survival.

Slaves in other regions remember being fed out of a trough, a practice which reinforced the slaves' subordinate position in white-dominated society. Harry Bridges, a former slave from Pike County, Mississippi, described his mistress Mrs. Sartin who, twice a day, "would walk to the negro quarters, and have all the little negroes who ranged in age from one to eight rounded up like so many small animals" before she "herded the little negroes down to the house and to the filled trough."¹⁶ The testimonies given by former

¹³South Carolina Narrative, Part 3, 200.

¹⁴The vegetables slaves raised, especially collard greens and sweet potatoes, provided essential vitamins and minerals.

¹⁵South Carolina Narratives, Part 3, 167.

¹⁶George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vol. 6, *Mississippi Narratives, Part I* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), 208-209.

slaves in the low country, though, reveal a different experience. At the midday meal, children ate together and were served half-sized portions. Maggie Black, born on Jim Wilkerson's South Carolina rice plantation, recalled: "Oh, gourds wuz de t'ing in dem days. Dey wuz wha' de peoples hab to drink outer en wash dey hominy en rice in aw de time. Dey wuz de bestest kind uv bowl fa we chillun to eat corn bread en clabber outer."¹⁷ Sabe Rutledge remembered that "chillun eat with wooden spoons."¹⁸ Low country slave families found ways to circumvent their masters' paternalistic routines regarding food, and children could eat with some degree of dignity, apparently unlike children in other inland regions.

Food played an important role in slave culture. Slave cooks maintained cultural continuity with their native West African cuisine and adapted African tradition to a new environment. Rice, benne--or sesame--seeds, gourds, okra, and palmetto trees--from which slaves took and ate palmetto cabbages--were all grown and used on both continents. Because much of the geographic landscape to which American slaves were introduced was radically different from their homeland, they had to create new cultural patterns with regard to food. Because the vegetation was so similar, though, slaves in tidewater Georgia and South Carolina were able to preserve some continuity with African practices regarding food.¹⁹

Food and its preparation also had social aspects. Along the coast, slaves preferred to grind their own corn using stones and wooden poles or corn cobs as mortars and pestles, rather than having it processed for them.²⁰ A woman and her children often worked together

¹⁷*South Carolina Narratives, Part 1*, 60.

¹⁸*South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, 59.

¹⁹Even today, benne wafers and other recipes using benne seeds are marketed in Charleston, Savannah, and elsewhere in the low country, indicating the continued presence of African and Gullah influences on low country eating patterns.

²⁰Smith, 113-114.

to shell and grind their corn.²¹ Edward Thomas, a Georgia rice planter's son, remembered that slaves used corn-grinding as a courtship activity. He remembered that the "young men and girls, on moonlight nights, would meet to grind their corn around the hand mills" and to sing with and to each other.²²

Masters benefitted by giving their slaves adequate medical attention, clothing, and food. The slave community, though, would not be entirely subjugated by the cycle of paternalism. They spent time with each other in the absence of the master, adapted African practices regarding clothing and food to America, and cultivated and prepared their own food. Coastal slave children grew up learning that, although slaves needed some provisions from the planter, they were not wholly dependent on him.

²¹Johnson, 135-136.

²²Smith, 114.

Chapter Five The Slave Family

"We family ain't had all dat to worry 'bout. Behave yourself and you all right. Plenty to eat, plenty to drink. Run 'round and enjoy yourself if you got uh mind to. Wuk when you wuk, play when you play."¹

--Ephriam Lawrence, former South Carolina slave

Slave families were burdened by slavery. High mortality rates, particularly among young slaves, housing and living conditions that were substandard by modern definitions, and the ever-present threat of sale put families in what was, at best, a precarious situation. Slavery did not, however, destroy the slave family.² Children frequently did not see their parents much during the day; they were placed in the nursery while their parents went about their daily tasks. Because the task system gave slaves a relatively large amount of free time, though, slave children in coastal and sea island Georgia and Carolina saw their parents more often than did some more inland slave children. Slaves used these "off times" to strengthen themselves and their children to withstand the realities of life in bondage and to spend time with each other.³ On Sundays, for example, many families cooked for themselves and sometimes attended some kind of worship service together. The slave family was the mechanism for the transmission of African-American cultural heritage and values, and served as the vehicle for a young slave's introduction into the larger slave community.⁴ Through a

¹*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 94.

²For a comprehensive discussion of the slave family, see Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*.

³*Down by the Riverside*, 140.

⁴*Ibid.*, 137.

slave's family, he "found companionship, love, sexual gratification, sympathetic understanding of his sufferings; he learned how to avoid punishment, to cooperate with other blacks, and to maintain his self-esteem."⁵ The family taught young slaves behavioral patterns and traditional values.⁶

Slave families tended to be monogamous. Slave marriages were not legally recognized, but slaveowners generally respected slaves' choices because of their more humanitarian impulses, and because they reasoned that slaves contented with their choice of a mate were more likely to increase the owner's slave population and to be productive workers. Planters in All Saints Parish, South Carolina, frequently had slave marriages solemnized by clergy because they regarded the family relationship as the key to a stable social order.⁷ Although planters used the family as a form of social control, it was "far more than an owner-sponsored device designed to reproduce the labor force."⁸ The slave family provided children with education, socialization, and support.

Parents disciplined their children severely to prevent their becoming "no-manners," which could result in punishment from the planter or overseer.⁹ They taught them to curtsy to whites, to hold out their hands when meeting someone, to respect their elders, and to keep silent except among family members--all practical and necessary skills for slaves. Arthur Sumner, a missionary to Saint Helena Island, Georgia, commented: "I don't suppose these

⁵John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 151.

⁶Smith, 177.

⁷*Down by the Riverside*, 137.

⁸Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 79.

⁹Johnson, 138-139.

children ever received a caress or a word of tenderness since they were infants. The children are invariably spoken to in harsh and peremptory tones by all grown niggers, and are whipped unmercifully on the least offence. Yet they are very obedient to their parents. . . ."¹⁰

Sumner's account reveals two very important pieces of information. First, that not only parents, but the slave community as a whole--a fictive extended family--were involved in child-rearing. Second, Sumner comments on children's obedience to their parents, attesting to the effective job parents did in teaching their offspring that they must get into the habit of obedience in the slave community to be able to carry it out consistently in the larger household of black and white. Laura M. Towne, also a missionary to Saint Helena Island, concluded "that parents were not really harsh to their children, but that their rough way of ordering them about, threatening to 'skin um 'live' and to 'bro'k um back' merely sounded savage."¹¹ Children apparently understood on some level that their parents' teachings were directed at helping them survive their lives in bondage rather than making their lives miserable, because "all visitors to the sea islands, either as guests of the master before the War or as missionaries agreed that the children, despite the rough treatment from their parents and despite the fact that they seemed to have no games, were a happy carefree lot."¹²

Slave children living along the coast typically grew up with their mothers as the primary family figures in their lives. Planters made women the dominant sex in slave family life. The cabin in which her family lived belonged to her, children were listed in plantation

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 139.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 139.

¹²*Ibid.*, 139.

records as hers, and, in most cases, the privilege of naming the baby was hers unless she deferred to the child's father or to a friend or relative.¹³ Many West African families were based on a matrilineal structure, so slaves may have transplanted their own social system and planters later followed it. Female hands were typically more adept at harvesting rice, so planters may have accorded them status based on that as well.¹⁴ Conversely, many inland planters "saw some advantage in strengthening the power of the male in the household."¹⁵

Women and children participated together in supplying the basic needs of the slave family. On rations day, women stood together with their children to receive their weekly allowance from the driver or from the master. Women carried their children with them to do any number of household tasks. Dye Williams, a former slave from Old Fort, an area near Savannah, could "recall when her slave mother used to carry her on her back to the spring on their plantation."¹⁶ Guion Johnson, in her *Social History of Georgia*, described low country children's role in feeding their families:

With the aid of her children, the mother prepared supper from the rations just issued, supplementing the corn and salt pork with "turnip salad" or cow-peas from the "patch" back of the cabin, sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes, oysters or crabs from the creek, or with luxuries which she had bought at one of the island stores.¹⁷

Coastal slave children participated in the slave economy and in providing food for their families in addition to what the household was given by the master. From an early age, these young slaves watched their black parents buy and sell, not only with other slaves, but with

¹³*Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁴Smith, 10.

¹⁵Genovese, 489.

¹⁶*Drums and Shadows*, 3.

¹⁷Johnson, 136.

white shopkeepers as well. The low country slave economy seems to have been more extensive than in inland plantation belts.

Mothers loomed large in their children's lives. Even when she was questioned by interviewers, having been free for over sixty years, Dye Williams still wore large gold earrings which she had worn since her mother pierced her ears as a small girl. Her mother had come from Africa, where among her people women pierced their ears, so she had pierced her daughter's as an African tradition and as a physical identification mark.¹⁸

Men played an important role in the slave family as well; even in a family with no resident father, children saw positive images of male slaves--intelligent drivers, skilled craftsmen, and, to a limited extent, slave preachers. Eugene Genovese writes that "the norm in the quarters called for adults to look after children, whether blood relatives or not. Every plantation had some men who played this role. Under the worst of circumstances, one would have been enough; usually, however, there were a number."¹⁹ Slave men, whether fathers or not, also helped supply families' needs. Many coastal men made their own canoes to sell and to use for transportation along rivers. They added necessary protein to slaves' diets by fishing and collecting oysters and crabs in local waterways and by hunting.

Slave children respected their parents and other adult slaves, as missionary Arthur Sumner noted. Although the practice is not exclusively African in origin, respect for one's elders was a traditional value among many African groups. Hagar Brown, a former

¹⁸*Drums and Shadows*, 3.

¹⁹Genovese, 493, 487.

Waccamaw slave, instructed her children, "Anybody older than you, you must honor them."²⁰ The admonition reinforced the lessons slaves learned about racial etiquette; slave children must respect anyone older, whether white or black. On Waccamaw plantations, slave elders were given the special honorific titles of Uncle and Aunty or Maum(a) and Daddy by all of the younger slaves.²¹ These lessons pervaded multiple aspects of slave life. At meals where a multi-generational group of slaves shared a common pot, older slaves helped themselves first, then let the children eat to their satisfaction before relinquishing whatever was left to the dogs.²²

Elders played a role in the education of young slaves. Often they had stories of Africa, or at least of life before younger slaves were born, and they helped slaves learn the ropes of interracial interaction. Children were sometimes "apprenticed" to an older family member. Thomas Goodwater, a former Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, slave, remembered that "I use to help my gran'ma 'round the kitchen who wus the cook for the fambly."²³

The family role could not always be filled by a slave's biological family because children and parents were separated so frequently. When a family was divided, a network of extended and fictive kin assumed the parental role and became slaves' survival mechanism. Young people left orphaned, whether by their parents' death or by their sale, were absorbed into friendly households, a retention of a West African attitude.²⁴ The slave communities

²⁰*Down by the Riverside*, 64.

²¹*Down by the Riverside*, 64-65.

²²Johnson, 136.

²³*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 166.

²⁴Twining, 1.

along the coast typically had a group-oriented philosophy that extended to more than simply helping those less able finish their tasks. Hagar Brown, one of Governor Joshua Allston's slaves on his Oaks plantation in Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, described a situation in which her father fed the family's weekly ration of corn to their chickens and the community helped the family for the remainder of the week:

Give you ration jess many chillun you got. Ma say chillun feed all the corn to the fowl. Chillun say, 'Papa love he fowl! Papa love he fowl! Three peck a day! Three peck a day! Parent come to door. Not a grain of corn leave! Poor people! Come, drop! Not a grain! Everybody on the hill help. One give this; one give that.²⁵

Slave families, universally across the South, were not destroyed by slavery, and strove for as much normality in their lives as possible. Families focused on teaching their children the intricacies of interracial relationships on the plantation. Low country slave children often matured in a monogamous, matrifocal household, though their families could be disbanded at the master's discretion. The slave community could, in such situations, step in to provide help. The community in which tidewater slaves grew up actively participated in an economy --often interracial--in which most slave families took part, typically without any involvement by their masters.

²⁵South Carolina Narratives, Part 1, 113.

Chapter Six Master-Slave Relationships

"Brookgreen and Springfield every Sunday morning, every gal and the young one must dress up and go to the yard and Miss Bessie give 'em candy. Don't want too much o' beating. Glad to see young women dance."¹

--Ben Horry, former Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, slave

Some coastal planters appear to have cared genuinely for their slaves. Most though, were motivated perhaps to some extent by humanitarian impulses, but also by economics and self-serving paternalism. Slave narratives abound with descriptions of benevolent masters. Susan Hamlin, herself a former slave from the Charleston area, recalled: "Seem like Mr. Fuller just git his slaves so he could be good to dem. He made all the little colored children love him. If you don't believe they loved him what they all cry, and scream, and holler for when dey hear he dead?"² Some slaves gauged their masters' leniency by the amount of time spent in leisure. Adele Frost, born into slavery in South Carolina in 1844, remembered that her master "was kind to his slaves an' his overseer was all Negroes. He had a large farm at Parker's Ferry. He worked his slaves 'til twelve in the day an' the res' of the day they could do their own work."³ Other slaves used the type of work they were assigned to measure their masters' kindness. Maggie Black, born about 1855 on Jim Wilkerson's Carolina rice plantation, told an interviewer that her master and his family "al'ays wuz good to me, honey.

¹*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 317.

²*Ibid.*, 228.

³*Ibid.*, 88.

Ne'er didn't hab to do no field work."⁴

Some research indicates that sea island planters tended to retain slaves even at a financial sacrifice to themselves. Thomas Spalding of Sapelo Island, Georgia, for example, bought his slaves from Charleston and from the West Indies. All of his transactions were completed before 1810--after that year, because of the phenomenal natural increase on his plantation, he never bought another slave during his lifetime nor did he sell any. Caroline Couper Lovell, a Georgia planter's daughter, recalled that Spalding was a "kind and indulgent master. The tasks of his slaves were comparatively light, they had many privileges, and no slave was ever sold from his place."⁵ Many planter families kept groups of slaves within their family, even if ownership was transferred from generation to generation, or among brothers and cousins. Motte Alston, a Waccamaw planter, described his slave Scipio, who, "with many others, was bought by my grandfather from a New England slave-ship which came in Charleston to dispose of her cargo. [Scipio] was never resold, but like most of [Alston's grandfather's] large number of negroes, lived and died in the same family."⁶ When they did have to sell, the planter typically tried to sell his slaves in family groups. The guiding philosophy was that "Negroes worked better and were more satisfied to make a change of masters when the whole or a part of their families went with them."⁷

The sale of slaves often took place because of circumstances out of the master's

⁴South Carolina Narratives, Part 1, 60.

⁵Caroline Couper Lovell, *The Golden Isles of Georgia* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Co., 1970), 99-100.

⁶Down by the Riverside, 38.

⁷Johnson, 35-36.

control, although some masters simply sold out of callousness. Coastal slaves, though, may have had an advantage over slaves further inland. Julia Floyd Smith, in her overview of Georgia's tidewater history *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860*, writes that "rice plantation slaves [may have] benefitted from the select type of owner who was born and bred in a traditional aristocratic slave society where benevolent and patriarchal attitudes had been nurtured over the years and were more pronounced than in the newer frontier plantation belts."⁸ The overarching reality, though, was that slaves were sometimes sold because of their owners' financial situations. At one sale, advertised in the January 8, 1823, edition of *Daily Georgia*, a family of nine slaves, all listed by name in the advertisement, were sold together to the highest bidder to satisfy debt. A mulatto slave, Jane, and her child were sold the same day to pay a debt incurred by Ashe Howe to John Haupt.⁹ Some masters at least attempted to place conditions on the treatment of slaves whom they sold. One Savannah planter placed an ad in the *Daily Morning News* on September 5, 1859, advertising a group of house servants for sale with the understanding that they would remain in the city. He described the slaves as a female who was a "good cook, washer, and ironer," her two children, and two other servants who were being sold "for no fault," but because of his own financial straits.¹⁰

Pierce Butler had to sell 436 of his slaves to satisfy his creditors. He classified and valued his slaves for sale in family groups, though they were not always sold together. Butler gave a new silver dollar to each slave he had to sell. Butler was perhaps motivated by

⁸Smith, 111.

⁹*Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 106.

kindness or a sense of responsibility to his slaves. He had made minimal effort to ensure that they were sold as family units by grouping them as such. His ultimate failure to do so, though, was one of the realities of slave families' lives. Parents could be sold away from their children, and husbands away from their wives, to satisfy a planter's debt, and their only compensation, if they received any at all, was a silver dollar, which hardly assuaged their feelings.

Planters were motivated partly by humanitarian concerns, but even these stemmed from an intricate system of paternalism. This paternalistic attitude is reflected in the narratives of coastal slaves. Sabe Rutledge, who grew up on the Ark plantation in Horry County, South Carolina, told an interviewer that "fust thing I realize to remember, I nuster [*sic*] cry to go to the old boss--old Massa--for sugar. Massa say: 'Martha, what Newman (he call me that) crying for?' Ma say, 'Wanter come to you for sugar!' 'Bring the boy here, Martha!' He gie me sugar."¹¹ One suspects that had Martha replied, "He needs new shoes," or "He wants a well-balanced hot meal," or "His diaper needs to be changed," the master's reaction might have been a different one. Rutledge's request, though, was an easy one for the master to fulfill, and the planter had the added bonus of feeling benevolent about feeding one of his slave children a bit of sugar, so he obliged.

Some planters mourned the deaths of favorite slaves. Certainly they may have been saddened by the death of one of their slaves, but it seems likely that their impulses were colored by paternalism. Georgia rice planter James Hamilton Couper, in an 1857 letter to his son, recounted plantation deaths:

¹¹South Carolina Narratives, Part 4, 59.

To myself personally, the most painful loss has been that of poor old Sandy and his wife Joan. . . . I requested Mr. Brown to read the funeral service at his grave; and your mother, myself, and the family attended. He was an honest, faithful and good man; and I part with him as with a devoted and tried friend. He was among my earliest playmates, and during my whole life his attachment never varied. I shall gratify myself by placing a stone on his grave.¹²

In his epistle, Couper's use of the phrase "I shall gratify myself" further suggests that he was not motivated entirely by love for his departed playmate who was "as" a devoted and tried friend, but by a need to fill the obligations of a master to a slave.

Ephriam Lawrence described this pervasive paternalism, although that was not his primary objective, when he remarked that the African-American community had not always had hard times--"Ain't been dat way when I been [little] boy. You ain't lacking fer nutting den dat you really need. No tussling 'bout fer yourself and knock 'round from pillar to post. If we need anything slavery time we ax fer um--make we want known. Any feelingably white man who hab slave, gib we what we need. No puzzling 'tall."¹³ This then, is the paradox in which slave children along the coast grew up. They lived in an area that was older, wealthier, and dominated by fewer families than their counterparts further inland, and this elite tended to be inculcated in the values of paternalism from an early age. The planter class could almost be friends with the slaves they had as playmates growing up, but the number of slaves they owned and the dominance of paternalism prevented the real intimacy found between masters and slaves on some smaller plantations.

Some planter families raised slave children in the Big House. Sometimes the situation was arranged because the child was to be reared as a house servant, while other times, the

¹²Johnson, 95-96.

¹³*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 95.

motivation was more paternalistic. Abbey Mishow, who grew up on Waterford, a rice plantation in Georgetown County, South Carolina, explained:

My mudder died w'en I was almost uh baby; she was de tailor and seamstress for our people. De missus promise my ma to tek care of me, and she sho' did. I was raise just like a pet. De fust crack out of me dat window sash gwine heist to find out what ail me. I hardly miss my ma, no mudder couldn't treat me better dan I treat.¹⁴

The master's family, then, sometimes stepped in to play the role normally filled, if not by biological parents, then by the larger fictive family of the slave community.

Slave children who grew up as intimate companions of the residents of the Big House had certain protections unknown by field slaves. Their physical surroundings and treatment might be better. Joe Rutherford, born around 1846 on Morris Island, South Carolina, belonged to "Colonel Daryton Rutherford, doct's son, [who] had me for a 'pet' on the place. They had overseers who was sometimes bossy but they wouldn't allow dem to whip me."¹⁵ Abbey Mishow, raised by her surrogate mother-mistress told an interviewer, "I tell you I bin spoiled, I raise onderneat' Miss Clara [and] dem [other members of the planter's family]."¹⁶ Adele Frost, born in South Carolina in 1844, remembered her "ole time four post" bed "with pavilion hangin' over the top."¹⁷

More commonly, though, slave children in the Big House had living conditions more like those in the quarters. Former Beaufort, South Carolina, slave Lucretia Heyward simply

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 197. When Mishow says "dat window sash gwine heist," she describes her mistress' behavior: when Mishow was audibly upset, her mistress opened a window to check on her.

¹⁵*South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, 55.

¹⁶*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 198.

¹⁷*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 88.

"sleep on floor in Miss Blunt room w'en I small."¹⁸ Adele Frost "didn't git any money but a place to stay an' a plenty of food an' clothes" when she came at age twelve to work as a maid for Mr. Mitchell.¹⁹ Again, though, the experience differed, even among house servants. Lucretia Heyward "eat food left ober from table," which was almost certainly better than what slave children in the quarter were eating, but she was re-learning the lesson that slaves were so subordinate that she was fit only to eat the remnants of the master's meal.²⁰ House slaves lived in a paradoxical world, which Amos Gadsden summarized: "I grew up with the white children in the family, but I was trained to step aside at all times for white people." He also remembered that he "never got a slap from my mistress; I was treated like a white person; if my mistress talked to me to correct me, I want to cry. Sometime I slept at the foot of my mistress bed."²¹ One suspects, however, that although Gadsden describes being "treated like a white person," there were distinct boundaries between his position and that of his mistress.

Slave children learned early that paternalism and punishment were not mutually exclusive. Lucretia Heyward told an interviewer that "Mr. Blunt nebber lick me, but Miss Blunt cut my back w'en I don't do to suit her."²² Gabe Lance, of Sandy Island, South Carolina, was only a young teenager when the Civil War began, but he knew that "any slave run way or didn't done task, put 'em in barn and least cut they give 'em been twenty-five to

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 88.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 279.

²¹*Ibid.*, 91-92.

²²*Ibid.*, 279.

fifty. Simply cause them weak and couldn't done task--couldn't done task! Give 'em less rations to boot!"²³ It was in this area that the task system proved invaluable. In the gang system, opportunity to help weaker slaves was more limited. The community-minded orientation of life in the low country, and the threat of punishment, whether the consequence was whipping, loss of rations, or both, led slaves to work cooperatively.

Sexual abuse was a widespread reality of slave life. Low country slaves, though, were in a slightly less precarious situation than some other slaves. Blacks outnumbered whites by a large margin along the coast, and blacks and whites spent much of their time in isolation from others and from each other. Johnson writes, based on missionary work done on the Georgia sea islands just after the War broke out, "there seems to have been very little intimacy between the white men and the Negro women on Saint Helena Island. The Northern missionaries found not more than five or six mulattoes on the whole island in 1861."²⁴ Of course, a single sea island, and one of the most remote at that, cannot be construed as an infallible model for the entire low country. Still, it seems possible that the sexual abuse of female slaves by white men in the low country happened less frequently than in inland regions.

Coastal slave children received early lessons in master-slave relationships. For the most part, tidewater Carolina and Georgia planters were highly paternalistic--some low country slaves received small rewards and treats from their masters, and some slave children were reared by the slaveowners and their families. Even slave children belonging to a

²³*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3, 92.*

²⁴Johnson, 134.

benevolent master, however, depended on the slave community for support. Coastal rice and sea island cotton plantations were so large that only a small percentage of slaves developed close relationships with their masters. Although the size of tidewater plantations afforded some protection that inland slave children did not have, the threat of sexual abuse, punishment, and sale necessitated the strong bond between coastal slave children and the slave community.

Chapter Seven

Coastal Slave Children's Religion and Education

"Missis, what for me learn to read? me have no prospect."¹
--a slave's response when questioned by Fanny Kemble as to why he had not learned to read

Low country slaves enjoyed a greater degree of religious attention, and of religious freedom, than slaves elsewhere in the South. After the Stono Rebellion in 1739, white South Carolinians were very concerned about slave behavior and privileges. Masters widely accepted that religion could be a calming influence on slaves and could lower the risk of potential uprisings; docile, obedient slaves were compliant, productive workers, so although literacy and movement were strictly limited among coastal slaves by laws--passed in 1740 and strengthened in 1834--religion was not.²

In fact, planters, in their quest to bring religion to their servants, sometimes flouted the laws which prevented them from teaching their slaves to read and write. Many masters, and even more mistresses and white children, taught some of their bondsmen to read and write.³ Sarah Grimké recalled that she "took an almost malicious satisfaction in teaching my little waiting-maid at night, when she was supposed to be occupied in combing and brushing my long locks. The light was put out, the keyhole screened, and flat on our stomachs, we defied the laws of South Carolina."⁴ Grimké later an expatriate abolitionist, may have been

¹Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1863), 314.

²Vlach, 145.

³*Down by the Riverside*, 215-216.

⁴Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 76.

atypical even in her yount, but former Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, slave Albert Carolina remembered that his driver illegally taught a small group of slave children on his plantation to read at night.⁵ Waccamaw mistresses Emily Weston of Hagley and Mary Vereen Magill of Richmond Hill both taught some of their slaves to read the Bible. Weston gave Testaments to the graduates of her literacy classes.⁶

Books of any sort were prized possessions. London, a slave on Pierce Butler's coastal Georgia plantation, requested of Fanny Kemble as she was leaving for Philadelphia, that she send "a lot of Bibles and prayer books."⁷ Sir Charles Lyell, on his second visit to the coastal region in the mid-nineteenth century, discovered that some of the planters in Glynn County, Georgia, "have of late permitted the distribution of Bibles among their slaves," and he noted that "they who were unable to read were as anxious to possess them as those who could."⁸

Even planters who did not bend rules went to great lengths to ensure a "proper" religious upbringing of their slaves. In especially pious families, the planter took upon himself, or delegated to his children, the responsibility of instructing their slaves, especially the younger ones, in religious principles. Frederika Bremer remembered trying to teach the Lord's Prayer to the slave children on the plantation where she was living.⁹

Many masters maintained Sabbath Schools on their estates.¹⁰ On most plantations,

⁵South Carolina Narratives. Part I, 198, 197.

⁶Down by the Riverside, 216.

⁷Kemble, 166.

⁸Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 240.

⁹Remember Me, 38.

¹⁰Robert Q. Mallard, D.D., *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1892), 156.

attendance at the Sabbath School was not mandatory, but encouraged. Frances Hodgson recalled her father's efforts to evangelize his slaves. "There was Sabbath School each Sunday afternoon, under the big live oaks. My father would read from the Bible and we would tell simple stories to the children and many grownups who came with them."¹¹ Albert Carolina, a former slave owned by the Allstons of Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, also remembered "Sabbus School." "Brought us up in Sabbus School. Sunrise prayer-meeting. Ten o'clock Sunday school. 'Leven o'clock service again. Three o'clock service again. Eight at night--service again. Raise us [taught] in the church."¹²

Sundays were a time for the master to inspect his slaves as they all gathered together. Susan Hamlin, a coastal South Carolina slave, told an interviewer that "dey couldn't just fix us up any kind of way when we going to Sunday School. We had to be dressed nice, if you pass him and you ain't dress to suit him he send you right back and say tell your ma to see dat you dress right. Dey couldn't send you out in de cold barefoot neither."¹³ Former Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, slave Ben Horry recalled that when "Sund'y come we have to go to the Big House for Marse Josh [Ward] to see how the clothes fit."¹⁴

Because the coastal plantations were so large, many masters were not directly involved in the religious upbringing of their slaves; instead they allowed missionaries or hired priests to fill that role. Waccamaw rice planter J. Motte Alston described Alexander Glennie, an Episcopal priest in charge of the All Saints planters' mission to their slaves. Alston recalled

¹¹*Remember Me*, 37.

¹²*South Carolina Narratives, Part 1*, 197.

¹³*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 228.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 310.

that Glennie always came "to dinner, after which he would teach the negro children their catechism and preach to all of my negroes at night. They always had a half holiday on these occasions, so as to let them brush up and make a respectable appearance. It was a law that all should attend."¹⁵ Travelling ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Presbyterian church also tried to catechize slave children.¹⁶ On some plantations, missionaries' visits were uncommon, so the black family played an even greater role in a child's religious upbringing than they would have otherwise. Adele Frost, a former Parker's Ferry, South Carolina, slave, remembered that her "grandma use to teach the catkism an' how to sing."¹⁷ From Frost's comment, it is unclear whether her grandmother taught only Frost, or whether she taught slaves from the larger community. In either case, it is evident that some slaves assumed the responsibility for nurturing the spiritual faith of others without the master's direct supervision.

Coastal planters proved to be lenient in letting slaves choose their particular faith; masters' overriding concern seems to have been simply that their slaves were exposed to the tenets of Christianity. Lucretia Heyward, herself a South Carolina slave, commented that "prior to 'mancipation Waccamaw slaves were usually educated in the faith of their masters--the Episcopal church."¹⁸ Heyward's remark reflects a popular misconception; in fact, the Baptist faith was the dominant religion among low country slaves. As in the South in general, slaves often joined Baptist and Methodist churches where they worshipped together

¹⁵*Down by the Riverside*, 155.

¹⁶Mallard, 154-155.

¹⁷*South Carolina Narratives*, Part 2, 89.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 285.

with whites, although the bondsmen were in segregated pews.

In coastal Georgia, entirely black Baptist churches were also a major presence. In the Sunbury Baptist Association of Georgia in 1857, thirteen of the twenty-five churches affiliated with the Association were entirely black.¹⁹ In comparison with other regions, the Sunbury Association was "unparalleled for the number and size of its separate black churches."²⁰ Although most of these independent churches operated at least nominally under white supervision, black ministers served the congregations. The churches experienced rapid growth. In 1790, the First African Baptist Church of Savannah, led by slave preacher Andrew Bryan, had about 225 full communicants and about 350 converts, and similar growth patterns continued into the nineteenth century.²¹ Coastal slave children might have been taken to one of these independent churches where they saw black men, often slaves, assuming leadership positions.

Although many slaves attended organized religious events, because so many of the plantations were relatively isolated, not all could attend organized church services or listen to a visiting missionary. The slave community as a whole tended to prefer the informal services led by other slaves where they felt comfortable singing and shouting "to express their African religious forms and to seek relief from their oppression."²² Missionaries learned this lesson, and used it to their advantage in their work. Charles Colcock Jones' missionary work among slaves on Georgian and South Carolinian rice plantations was successful because he appointed

¹⁹Smith, 165.

²⁰Raboteau, 197.

²¹*Ibid.*, 141.

²²Smith, 159.

slave preachers, who taught Christianity and its tenets to their peers more easily than did white preachers.²³

The plantation missionary movement was a popular nineteenth-century cause all over the South. Because three-quarters of the population in this area were slaves, coastal plantations in South Carolina and Georgia were primary targets for missionary activity.²⁴ It was in the low country, consequently, that children were most likely to attend worship services in buildings devoted exclusively to slave worship.²⁵ Along the coast, slaves were encouraged to build small wooden halls they called "praise houses" for their Sunday services and weekly prayer meetings.²⁶ In these chapels, young slaves were given, by their parents and other members of the slave community, religious instruction which combined their African-influenced worldview with the Christian doctrines of their masters, which they turned to their own advantage. Slaves used these unpretentious buildings for their own worship and their own style of activity, showing their masters that while they might be manipulated to some extent, they would never completely abandon their own practices.

One of the ways in which slaves meshed their African and American religious experiences was through their use of song and dance. Slaves prayed at the rising and the setting of the sun, using the reverent refrain, "meena, mina, mo," which first slave children, then white children, adopted as a counting game.²⁷ If masters deprived slaves of their

²³*Ibid.*, 159.

²⁴Raboteau, 155.

²⁵Vlach, 146.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 147.

²⁷Fancher, 46.

evening prayer time, slaves turned to their African roots to solve the problem. They used either songs with a disguised meaning, like the spiritual *Steal Away to Jesus*, or, more commonly, a distinct pattern of drum beats to inform the community, and sometimes neighboring plantations, of a clandestine slave prayer meeting. Once assembled, they turned a pot or a washtub upside down, a West African practice which symbolized the divine protection of the African gods. The physical environment of these discreet meetings, in brush arbors or woods, was a parallel to the African tradition of worshipping in sacred groves.²⁸

The coastal slaves' religious leaders, whether they led openly or in secrecy, were often literate. Former low country slave Elisha Doc Carey remembered that "dem what could read was most allus called on by de others for preachin'".²⁹ Religion and literacy were closely linked--much of coastal slaves' reading was done in the Bible, which was sometimes the only book a planter's family owned. Along the South Carolina and Georgia coasts, slave literacy seems to have been more common than in other regions, but it was not widespread.³⁰ Prince, the coachman on Plowden Weston's Waccamaw plantation, is referred to in surviving letters as "bookish."³¹ In slave preacher Andrew Bryan's church, about fifty slaves could read, a number representing about nine percent of the congregation.³² Urban slaves were more likely to have been taught to read. Because many of their masters spent time in

²⁸Smith, 162-163.

²⁹Cornelius, 88.

³⁰*Down by the Riverside*, 216.

³¹*Ibid.*, 216.

³²Raboteau, 141. Raboteau cites data from the Sunbury Baptist Association, which numbers the church's congregation as 225 full communicants and 350 converts (a total congregation of 575), fifty of whom could read.

Charleston or Savannah, or some of the smaller towns, and took some of their slaves with them into town and brought them back to the plantation upon their return, most slaves in the coastal regions had either lived at least temporarily in a city or knew others who had. Most slaves, then, knew a literate slave even if they themselves were not.

Educating their slave children was not a priority for most masters. Joe Rutherford, born on Morris Island, South Carolina, in 1846, told an interviewer that most of the slaves "didn't learn to read and write. The mistress learnt some of de nigger chaps to read and write a little."³³ Maggie Black, born into bondage on Jim Wilkerson's South Carolina rice plantation in 1855, in response to an interviewer's question, answered, "No'mam, didn't hab no schools tall den. Ne'er gi'e de colored peoples no l'arnin' no whey [before] freedom 'clare. Wha' little l'arnin' come my way wuz wha' I ge' when I stay wid Miss Martha Leggett down dere to Leggett's Mill Pond."³⁴ Lucretia Heyward remarked that her master and mistress "nebber learn me to read and write. I ain't hab time for sech t'ing," and Adele Frost told an interviewer that she "never gone to school in my life an' massa nor missus ever help me to read."³⁵

Most coastal slaves were given some sort of religious instruction, and despite strict anti-literacy laws, coastal planters and their families sometimes gave their slaves literary instruction as well. Literate slaves were respected leaders in the slave community, often called on to take positions of religious leadership. Coastal slave children's religious upbringing under the strong slave leaders was a blend of African and Christian practices.

³³ *South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, 55-56.

³⁴ *South Carolina Narratives, Part 1*, 59.

³⁵ *South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 279, 88.

The slave community was strengthened by sharing their religious experiences and literacy skills. Slaves who could read often helped other slaves to read and write. Because of the large numbers of slaves on low country plantations, the cooperative approach generally used by the coastal slave community, some tidewater slaves' access to urban centers, and the elitist paternalism of many of their masters, the slaves of the South Carolina and Georgia coast may have been slightly more literate than other regions, although the data to support this conclusively would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find.³⁶

³⁶In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Eugene Genovese notes that W.E.B. Du Bois made an estimate that about five percent of slaves were literate by 1860. Genovese believes the number may have been too low. He also notes that "black efforts appear to have been more important than white" in teaching other slaves to read; the black majority along the Carolina and Georgia coasts could have had an impact on the total number of slaves who were taught basic literacy skills. Genovese, 563.

Chapter Eight

The Socializing Tools of the Slave Community

"I do remembuh the big times we use tuh have wen I wuz young."¹

--Hettie Campbell, former slave from Saint Mary's Island, Georgia

The off-times--or big times--activities of coastal slaves were an important facet of slave children's lives. One South Carolina planter had trouble disciplining his slaves. He tried supplying them with fiddles and drums and "promoted dancing." To his surprise, his idea worked--the slaves' morale, and consequently behavior and performance, improved. The slaves began holding dances at night either in the open or in a family's cabin. The activity was multi-generational, and the entire slave group "participated in the merrymaking."² The recollections of men and women who grew up in bondage in the low country are filled with accounts of the social life of the community.

Masters who owned fifty or more slaves had difficulty preventing interplantation visits³; most of the planters along the coast had significantly larger slave populations. Despite the isolation of the plantations, many slaves travelled off their plantations at least infrequently. Adele Frost, born in 1844 in South Carolina, told an interviewer that the slave community of her childhood included not only the plantation on which she lived, but also neighboring estates. "Co'n shuckin' was always done in de night. Dere was also a dance. [As] de distance was five miles we would walk dere, work an' dance all night an' come back

¹*Drums and Shadows*, 187.

²Johnson, 143.

³Genovese, 571.

early nex' mornin'."⁴ Thomas Goodwater, a Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, slave born in 1855 described the frequency and nature of social events involving slaves from other coastal plantations, recalling that "dere use to be dances almos' ebery week an' the older boys an' gals walk twelve miles dis to be dere. Some time there wus a tambourine beater, some time dey use ole wash tubs an' beat it [with] wood sticks, an' some time dey jus' clap their han's."⁵ Oysters were plentiful in the low country, and Saturday night oyster roasts were common. The coastal community typically gathered by a fire in a clearing and sang African chants and danced African-style dances.⁶ James Roberts Gilmore, a Northern visitor to a Carolina plantation, described the inclusive nature of the dances: "The little nigs, only four or five years old, would rush into the ring and shuffle away at the breakdowns till I feared their short legs would come off; while all the darkies joined in the songs, till the branches of the old pines above shook as if they too had caught the spirit of the music."⁷

Anna Johnson, of Harris Neck, Georgia, remembered that their activities sometimes included an even larger low country slave community than just a plantation and its neighbors:

Yes'm, I membuh bout how some time back dey use tuh beat out messages on duh drum. Dat wuz tuh let us know wen deah wuz tuh be a dance aw a frolic. Wen dey hab a dance obuh on Saint Catherine's dey beat duh drum tuh tell us bout it. Duh soun would carry obuh duh watuh an we would heah it plain as anything. Den duh folks heah beat duh drum tuh let em know bout it in udduh settlements.⁸

Drumming was a common method of communication between the isolated plantations as well

⁴*South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 89.

⁵*Ibid.*, 169.

⁶Fancher, 45.

⁷*Down by the Riverside*, 131.

⁸*Drums and Shadows*, 130.

as within a plantation. The drumming appears to have been an extension of an African communication practice. Susan Maxwell of Possum Point, Georgia, described two of the distinct types of drumming. "In duh ole days dey beat duh drum tuh call duh people tuh duh fewnul. Dey beat it slow--boom-boom-boom. Wen dey wannuh stuhrip duh folks fuh a dance aw frolic, dey beats duh drum fas. Den dey knows it ain fuh no fewnul an dat it's tuh uh good time."⁹

Harvest time was an especially important celebration for the slaves. Consistent with their West African heritage, they offered thanks for the produce. Additionally, after the harvest, slaves' tasks tended to be lighter for several weeks before they had to begin preparing the land for the next year's crops, so they had a sort of holiday for several days. Shad Hall of Sapelo Island, Georgia, remembered the harvest festivals and dances of his childhood: "Hahves time dey hab big time. It come once a yeah an dey pray an dey sing all night long till duh fus cock crow. Den dey staht tuh dance an tuh bow tuh duh sun as it riz in duh sky. Dey dance roun in a succle an sing an shout. Sho is a big time."¹⁰ Catherine Wing, who grew up as a slave on Saint Simon's Island, Georgia, offered a similar recollection:

We use tuh hab big times duh fus hahves, an duh fus ting wut growed we take tuh duh church so as ebrybody could hab a piece ub it. We pray obuh it an shout. Wen we hab a dance, we use tuh shout in a ring. We ain hab wut yuh call a propuh dance tuhday. One uh duh dances wuz call duh Buzzard Lope. It's a long time sence we done it, but I still membuh it. We ain hab much music in doze days but dey use a drum tuh call duh people tuhgedduh wen dey gonuh hab games aw meetin.¹¹

⁹*Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 168.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 174.

Slaves' primary designated holiday was Christmas. Former low country slave Ophelia Jemison described Christmas as "a howling time for all we colored people an' de chillun."¹² Henry Williams of Oakland plantation on Saint Mary's Island, Georgia, remembered Christmas fondly: "Roun Christmas we git three days' holiday an theah's plenty uh dances and shoutin then. We goes tuh the ownuh an gits a [written pass to travel off the plantation] an we all gathus at the same place an we shouts an kick up with each othuh. . . ."¹³ A Northern visitor commented on the gaiety of "a group of little negro girls, dressed in their favorite colors of green and white," who woke him by their "chanting of a Christmas hymn" below his window before scampering off to serenade another room.¹⁴ Many slaves had pleasant recollections of Christmas because of small privileges they received, typically in the form of extra rations. Sam Polite of Saint Helena Island, Georgia, remembered that they "nebber know nutting 'bout Santa Claus 'till Freedom, but on Christmas Maussa gib you meat and syrup and maybe t'ree day widout work."¹⁵ Emily Weston, the mistress of Hagley, Weehawka, True Blue, and Waterford plantations in South Carolina, visited the slaves' houses on each of the three days of the holiday, giving sugar to the children and extra rations to the "whole of men, women, and children" on the first day, and gingerbread to the children on the other two days.¹⁶

Games were a component of the holiday and weekend celebrations, but low country

¹²George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement, Series I*, Vol. 11, *North Carolina and South Carolina Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1977), 214.

¹³*Drums and Shadows*, 189.

¹⁴*Down by the Riverside*, 134.

¹⁵*South Carolina Narratives, Part 3*, 273.

¹⁶*Down by the Riverside*, 101, 135.

slave children did not limit their play to special occasions. Sam Mitchell, a former slave from Woodlawn plantation in Beaufort County, South Carolina, remembered that "slave chillen play mud-pie, mek house out ob sand and secher t'ing."¹⁷ Lucretia Heyward, who also grew up in bondage in Beaufort County, recalled that the slave children on her plantation "have a play-house. [Their master] Charlie buy from [his brother] Motte."¹⁸ Charles Joyner, in *Remember Me: Slave Life in Coastal Georgia*, described one of the children's games specifically. The game, Molly Bright, was a game shared by black and white children, who played in two groups, typically in the moonlight:

One side would sing out, 'Molly, Molly Bright! and the other would respond, 'Three score and ten!' The first side would then sing, 'Can I get there by candlelight?' and the second side would again respond, 'Yes, if your legs are long and light!' Then both sides would sing together, 'LOOK OUT FOR THE OLD WITCH!' and all the children would run and scream.¹⁹

Adele Frost, born a slave in coastal South Carolina, recalled a game played in the spirit of competition. She remarked that one person "have a han'ful of co'n den say, 'Trow Kissey Wilson let him go' while the res' is to guess how many co'n is lef' in his han's."²⁰

Some of the games children played helped them recognize the growing differences between black and white children as they approached adolescence. Maggie Black, born in 1855 on Jim Wilkerson's low country rice plantation, remembered a game in which, in an attempt to pretend that they had pretty dresses like the planter's daughters,

¹⁷South Carolina Narratives, Part 3, 202.

¹⁸South Carolina Narratives, Part 2, 285.

¹⁹Remember Me, 28.

²⁰South Carolina Narratives, Part 2, 89.

black chillun'ud go in de woods en ge' wild grape vine en bend em round en put em under us skirt en make it stand out big lak. Hadder hab uh bige [sic] ole ring fa de bottom uv de skirt on den one uh little bit smaller eve'y time dey ge' closer to de waist. Ne'er hab none tall in de waist cause dat wuz s'ppose to be little bitty t'ing.²¹

In play-fighting, a popular activity among slave children, they learned that they must abide by certain rules, whether in an intra- or interracial situation, but that they could still defend themselves. Thomas Goodwater recalled that "boys in dose days could fight but couldn' throw any one on the groun'. We had to stan' up and eider beat or git beat."²² Lucretia Heyward described a fight she had with another slave girl: "She knock me. I knock back! Wouldn't take a knock! She say, 'I tell Parson Glennie! Lord won't bless you! You bad.' I say, 'You knock me, I knock you!'"²³ Both Goodwater and Heyward articulate one of the basic tenets inculcated in young slaves: one must either beat or be beaten; in both cases, slaves learned to protect themselves physically, and in doing so, learned that they could do the same emotionally.

Slave children, through games, learned some of the lessons and practiced some of the skills that they needed to survive their lives in bondage. The most effective way the community had of educating its children, though, was through stories. On the sea islands and along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, as in Africa, storytelling was an informal social event and could occur anywhere.²⁴ Carrie Hamilton, a former Yamacraw, Georgia, slave, remembered that her mother regaled her with stories while they were sitting "in duh

²¹South Carolina Narratives, Part 1, 58.

²²South Carolina Narratives, Part 2, 167.

²³Ibid., 285.

²⁴Jones-Jackson, 37.

city market sellin vegetubbles an fruit."²⁵ Sabe Rutledge's mother told her children stories while they worked. He repeated the stories to an interviewer and explained:

How come I know all these Buh Rabbit story, Mudder spin you know. Have the great oak log, iron fire dog. Have we chillun to sit by the fireplace put the light wood under--blaze up. We four chillun have to pick seed out the cotton. Work till 10 pm at night and rise early! Mudder and Father tell you story to keep you eye open!²⁶

The most common of the stories, still popular today, were the Gullah animal stories. The stories had origins in Africa, where they were a favorite form of entertainment, and were often accompanied by drum-beating, songs, and audience participation.²⁷ The stories told to slave children focused on the struggle of Buh Rabbit to master his more powerful, but less intelligent, adversary Buh Wolf. The stories were an educational tool used by the community to teach slave children about their social world. They taught that the existing power relationships on plantations were not necessarily natural, that the appropriate behavior in one situation might not be as appropriate under different circumstances, and that the powerless--the trickster--must learn the way of the powerful.²⁸ Some of the tales delved into the more complex set of relationships associated with paternalism, including the benefits to slaves of cooperating to help the master--for if the planter's financial success ended, the slaves, too, felt repercussions. Most animal trickster tales emphasized the values and limits of trickery and demonstrated the triumph of the physically weak over the strong through wit.²⁹

Slaves parents and elders taught their children nursery rhymes which contained a truth

²⁵*Drums and Shadows*, 29.

²⁶*South Carolina Narratives, Part 4*, 67-68.

²⁷Smith, 174.

²⁸*Remember Me*, 45-46.

²⁹*Down by the Riverside*, 186, 189.

basic to their situation. In one poem, *Possum Trot*, slave parents reminded their children that conditions could worsen if the children were disobedient.

Way down yon'er in Possum Trot
In Ole Miss'sip' what de sun shines hot
Dere hain't no chickens and de Niggers eats co'n
You hain't never see'd de lak since youse been bo'n
You better min' Mosser an' keep a stiff lip
So's you won't get sol' down to Ole Miss'sip'.

In another rhyme, parents assured their children that desires to be free by fleeing North were normal, but they reminded the children to be careful.

Uncle Jack, he want to git free
He find de way Norf by de moss on de tree
He cross dat river a-floatin' in a tub
Dem Patterollers give 'im a mighty close rub.³⁰

One of the most common stories had to do, not with an animal trickster or with simple rhymes, but with magical Africans who had been brought to America but mysteriously flew back to their native land. Emma Monroe, who grew up on Wilton Bluff plantation in Georgia, remembered that "duh ole folks use tuh tell us chillun duh story bout people dat flied off tuh Africa." Mose Brown, a former Georgia low country slave, had also heard the story, and related it to an interviewer:

My gran use tuh tell me bout folks flyin back tuh Africa. A man an his wife wuz brung frum Africa. Wen dey fine out dey wuz slabs an got treat so hahd, dey jis fret and fret. One day dey wuz standin wid some udduh slabs an all ub a sudden dey say, 'We gwine back tuh Africa. So goodie bye, goodie bye.' Den dey flied right out uh sight.³¹

The idea that their parents or other members of the community could "all ub a sudden" fly

³⁰Smith, 176.

³¹*Drums and Shadows*, 18.

out of their lives must have frightened some of the children who heard the story. Serina Hall, of White Bluff, Georgia told a slightly altered, and more reassuring version:

Muh ma tell me many times bout a man an his wife wut could wuk conjuh. Anytime dey want tuh dey would fly back tuh Africa an den come back agen tuh duh plantation. Dey come back cuz dey hab some chillun wut didn hab duh powuh tuh fly an hab tuh stay on duh plantation.³²

Older members of the slave community also shared their experiences in Africa with the younger slaves. As late as 1860, some slaves on rice and sea island cotton plantations retained vivid memories of Africa. Ryna Johnson, born on Saint Simon's Island, mentioned that "Alexanduh, Jummy, and William, dey is all African. I membuh ole William well and he tell me lots bout times in Africa."³³ Even the white children on rice plantations grew up with stories of Africa.³⁴ The continued illegal importation of African slaves into the low country until 1858 ensured that the traditions of Africa were passed on to the younger generation of African-Americans.

Songs provided another link between Africa and the new Gullah culture. Lydia Parrish, who compiled songs of the sea islands, commented that "the slaves--like their African cousins--sang on every possible occasion. Religious ceremonies, as well as work and play, were all conducted to music."³⁵ Like songs that accompanied the ring shouts, rowing songs were common, and were probably African in origin.³⁶ Often while in transit on a river, "men, women, girls and boys are allowed while on deck to unite in African melodies

³²*Ibid.*, 81.

³³*Ibid.*, 175.

³⁴*Down by the Riverside*, 38.

³⁵Lydia Parrish, *Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* (New York: Creative Age Press, Inc., 1942), xv.

³⁶Wood, 202.

which they always enhance by an extemporaneous tom-tom on the bottom of a tub or tin kettle."³⁷

Like the stories slave parents told their children, some of the simple childhood songs low country children sang taught a lesson. Ellen Godfrey, who grew up on Longwood plantation in Georgetown County, South Carolina, related a song to an interviewer:

Send Tom Taggum
To drive Bone Baggum
Out the world o' wiggy waggum!³⁸

In the song, Bone Baggum is a bony cow who has strayed into the sea island cotton patch, and the child is reminded to keep the intruder out of the garden. Former low country slave Richard Mack remembered that his father, who "always played the violin," sang a warning song to him; one of the lines was "Run, nigger, run, de Patrol ketch you."³⁹ Louisa Brown, a former slave from Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, told an interviewer that there "wuz a sing we used to have on the plantation. Then we make up sing--we have sing for chillun. Make 'em go sleep." The song she sang was a simple lullaby:

Bye-o-baby!
Go sleepy!
Bye-o-baby!
Go sleepy!
What a big alligator
Coming to catch
This one boy!⁴⁰

The precariousness of the slave family weighed on tidewater families. Some of the

³⁷ *Panther*, 162.

³⁸ *South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, 163.

³⁹ *Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Washington Narratives*, 387.

⁴⁰ *South Carolina Narratives, Part 1*, 116-117.

songs of a more spiritual nature assured young children, by using images of mothers and fathers, that they would be reunited with their parents in heaven even if they were separated on earth. Mary Frances Brown, a former low country slave, sang two of these songs to an interviewer. The first assures the listener that she will meet her mother in heaven for an eternity of peace:

Mother where shall I meet you,
Bye and bye, bye and bye,
Mother where shall I meet you,
Bye and bye, bye and bye.

I will meet you over in Canaan,
Bye and bye, bye and bye,
I will meet you over in Canaan,
Bye and bye, bye and bye.

Then my troubles will be over,
Bye and bye, bye and bye,
Then my troubles will be over,
Bye and bye, bye and bye.

I will sit 'long side of my Jesus,
Bye and bye, bye and bye,
I will sit 'long side of my Jesus,
Bye and bye, bye and bye.

The second verse of the second of Brown's songs also contains questions from a slave to his parents:

Oh! Mother won't you come for me, when I die?
Oh! Father won't you come for me, when I die?
Bye-and-bye--bye and bye!
Oh Lord! Oh Lord!
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah! Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!⁴¹

Such reassurances must have been comforting to young slaves who knew that their parents

⁴¹*North Carolina and South Carolina Narratives*, 87, 89-90.

and siblings could be sold away from them at a moment's notice.

Although low country children knew they could be separated from their families, they had a relatively carefree childhood. They were introduced to manual work and the realities of slave-master relationships, but they also lived in a community that used social occasions, holidays, games, stories, and songs, not only for the children's education and socialization, but also for recreation. Many of the songs, stories, and games were preserved along the Georgia and South Carolina coast long after they had been lost elsewhere.⁴²

⁴²The heritage of the South Carolina and Georgia coasts is still of interest today. Nickelodeon, the children's cable channel, airs *Gullah Gullah Island*, a show depicting an African-American family living on one of the sea islands and sharing their culture with each other and with their neighbors.

Chapter Nine Conclusions

"That the happiest time I members, when I wuz a boy. . . ."¹
--Ben Horry, former Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina, slave

The word *Gullah* may be a corruption of the word *Angola*. Many of the Georgia and Carolina slaves were brought from Angola, and references in contemporary newspapers and elsewhere make reference to "Angola Negroes," and to "Gola Negroes," which may have been distorted into "Gullah Negroes."² The areas where this Gullah culture flourished--along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina--were regions where a black majority existed largely isolated from mainstream Euro-American civilization, conditions conducive to the survival of African cultural elements. The planters played a role in the survival of African culture--by cultivating rice, which was also grown in Africa, and by establishing a matrifocal slave family structure, they helped preserve Africanisms. Even some of the indigenous vegetation of the slaves' new home was similar to what they had had in Africa. Ed Thorpe, a former Harris Neck slave, remembered that his grandmother "come frum Africa an uh name wuz Patience Spaulding. She tell me dat in Africa she use tuh eat wile tings. I membuh she use tuh go out in duh woods roun yuh an bring back some kin uh weed wut she cook. She call it 'lam quato.' It look lak pokeberry to me."³ Coastal slave communities retained much of their African work patterns and folk culture.⁴ The arrival of new African-born slaves through

¹South Carolina Narratives, Part 2, 310.

²Smith, 172. Some scholars doubt that the word *Gullah* was derived from the word *Angola* because more of the low country slaves came from the rice-producing areas in present-day Sierra Leone and Liberia.

³Drums and Shadows, 121.

⁴Down by the Riverside, 37.

emancipation extended this continuity even further.

One of the most striking areas in which African heritage was preserved is in speech patterns and words. In fact, "there are a host of African-derived words in Gullah, some of which [were] generally unknown to [contemporary] inland black speakers." Among these are the following:

goober (peanut)--from Kimbundu
gumbo (okra)--from Tshiluba
chigger (small flea)--from Wolof
tote (to carry)--from Kikongo⁵

The slave community must be credited with the preservation of this African culture. Coastal slaves' art, dance, language, music, and social traditions all showed African origins, as did their manner of speech and some of their religious practices, particularly funeral traditions. They used their new African-American culture to withstand the worst aspects of the slave system. The older members of the fictive family of the slave community passed down their traditions to the younger. James Cooper, a Yamacraw, Georgia, slave, remarked that he "took up cahvin as paht time jis fuh the fun of it. Muh grandfathuh, Pharo Cooper, he used tuh make things frum wood an straw, sech as baskets and cheahs and tables an othuh things fuh the home. I guess I sawt of inherited it frum him."⁶ The children who grew up in this coastal community were socialized, through their relationship with the master, his family, and the church, but the primary agent of socialization in slave children's lives was the slave community itself.

In low country Georgia and South Carolina, children had a different experience from

⁵Jones-Jackson, 137.

⁶*Drums and Shadows*, 26.

children in more inland plantation belts. They were born into a different physical and architectural landscape based on sea island cotton and rice. Both crops are wet-staple ones, meaning they require an extraordinarily large labor force to cultivate because of the intricate irrigation processes. The masters to whom these children were born were wealthier than typical planters elsewhere, and these powerful men came from established, elite rice-planting families, who seem to have been more conscious of playing the role of the paternalistic, benevolent master. The houses in which these coastal children lived tended to be of sturdier materials and slightly more private than houses elsewhere. Many, and probably most, of them were involved frequently in religious worship and activities; the scope of religious activities among this black majority was wide.

Slave children in coastal and sea island Georgia and South Carolina lived under the task system. The implications of this are multiple--they saw their parents with more regularity and for longer duration than did children whose parents worked under the gang system. Because their parents had free time to cultivate crops and make crafts for sale, low country slave children benefited from the small luxuries purchased with the money. Their mothers used their income to round out their children's diets, and to buy furniture, cloth, and trifles.

These tidewater slave children grew up in a less restrictive environment than many of their peer group who lived further inland. They lived among a community of men and women whose roots were in Africa, and who shared their recollections of African song, dance, language, stories, recreational activities, and religious worldview with the younger generation of slaves. Their masters, whether willingly or not, permitted a discernible, and in

many ways distinct, slave culture of architecture, economy, music, art, and social structures to develop on the rice and long-staple cotton plantations of coastal and sea island Georgia and South Carolina.

Bibliographical Note

Most of my primary research focused on interviews conducted with former slaves by employees of the Federal Writers Project division of the Works Progress Administration. I used the relevant volumes from *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* and the interviews compiled by the Savannah Unit of the Writers Project in *Drums and Shadows*. These interviews are a rich resource. Since relatively few slaves could read and write, without their recorded oral testimonies, their lives are largely undocumented--the interviews are valuable in that they are former slaves' own descriptions of their lives in bondage. Of course, the interviews must be used carefully, as well. White interviewers let their own interpretations and biases color their transcriptions; much of what slaves told interviewers was simply deleted. Additionally, the former slaves were old men and women when interviewed, having been free for over sixty years. Some of their accounts are inaccurate, their perceptions having been changed in the intervening years. Still, the slaves' testimonies provide essential insight into slave life by former slaves.

I consulted a variety of secondary sources. The two upon which I relied most heavily were Charles Joyner's *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*, and Julia Floyd Smith's *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860*. Both volumes helped me piece together a general history of the region. Because both works dealt exclusively with the low country, they were useful. Joyner's book, though, is limited to the Waccamaw community that developed in Georgetown and Horry Counties, along the southern part of the Carolina coast. Smith's book is less specific, and although she informs the reader

from the beginning that she will prove the low country to be unique, her writing is more general in scope than her introduction would suggest.

In writing on specific topics, I found particular secondary sources helpful. In discussing coastal slaves' houses and gardens, I consulted *Back of the Big House*, by John Michael Vlach. Similarly, I relied on Albert J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* and Janet Cornelius' *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* in researching low country slaves' religious experiences.

Also beneficial were *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, by John Blassingame, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, by Eugene Genovese, and *Black Majority*, by Peter Wood. None of the three deal specifically with the low country, but all treat the general subjects with which I was concerned. Used together with other secondary and primary sources, these helped me research the lives of coastal and sea island slave children in South Carolina and Georgia.

In addition, because so much of my focus is on the community that developed in the coastal areas, I consulted a number of sources to learn more about sea island and Gullah culture, specifically, how they were different from the slave culture that developed in other regions and how they drew upon African influences in adapting to an American world. Of these, the most useful was *A Social History of the Sea Islands*, by Guion Johnson.

Selected Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Kemble, Frances Anne. *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*. New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1863.
- Mallard, Robert Q., D.D. *Plantation Life Before Emancipation*. Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1892.
- Rawick, George P., ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*. Vol. 2, *South Carolina Narratives Parts 1 and 2*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972.
- _____. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*. Vol. 3, *South Carolina Narratives Parts 3 and 4*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972.
- _____. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*. Vol. 6, *Mississippi Narratives, Part 1*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972.
- _____. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement, Series 1*. Vol. 11, *North Carolina and South Carolina Narratives*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1977.
- _____. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement, Series 2*. Vol. 1, *Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Washington Narratives*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1979.
- Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers Project, Works Progress Administration. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1972.

Secondary Sources

- Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Cornelius, Janet Duitsman. *When I Can Read my Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.

- De Vorse, Louis, Jr. *The Georgia-South Carolina Boundary: A Problem in Historical Geography*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982.
- Doar, David. *Rice and Rice Planting in the South Carolina Low Country*. Charleston: the Charleston Museum, 1936.
- Fancher, Betsy. *The Lost Legacy of Georgia's Golden Isles*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1971.
- Flanders, Ralph Betts. *Plantation Slavery in Georgia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
- Gutman, Herbert. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Johnson, Guion Griffis. *A Social History of the Sea Islands*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930.
- Jones-Jackson, Patricia. *When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.
- Joyner, Charles. *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
- _____. *Remember Me: Slave Life in Coastal Georgia*. Atlanta: Georgia Humanities Council, 1989.
- Littlefield, Daniel. *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.
- Lovell, Caroline Couper. *The Golden Isles of Georgia*. Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Co., 1970.
- Parrish, Lydia. *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*. New York: Creative Age Press, Inc., 1942.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Smith, Julia Floyd. *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985.

Twining, Mary A., and Keith E. Baird, eds. *Sea Island Roots*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1991.

Vlach, John Michael. *Back of the Big House*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

Wood, Peter. *Black Majority*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1974.